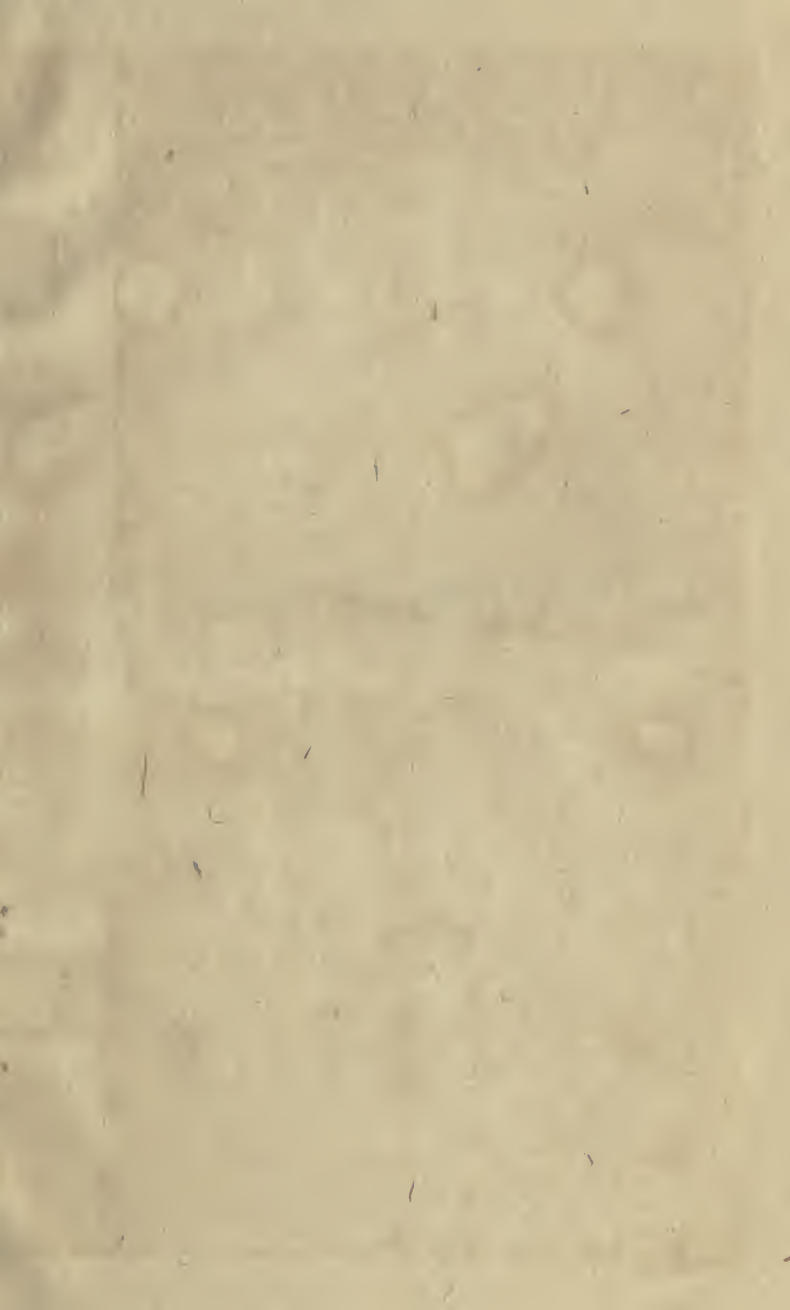


INTERNE  
IN  
GERMANY

Henry C. Mahoney.







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**INTERMED IN GERMANY**







### GERMAN OFFICERS OF RUHLEBEN CAMP.

Reading from left to right: Graf. Scherin, the Chief; Chief Censor, who was a favourite amongst the prisoners owing to his fair play; Baron von Taube, in Charge of Affairs (known as "Baron von Two Face"); the remaining two being Members of the Censor Department.

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# INTERINED IN GERMANY

NARRATED BY  
HENRY C. MAHONEY

Author of "Sixteen Months in Four German Prisons"

CHRONICLED BY  
FREDERICK A. TALBOT

ILLUSTRATED



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## PREFACE.

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IN response to the many requests which I have received from readers of my previous narrative, "Sixteen Months in Four German Prisons," for intimate details and reminiscences of life in the British internment camp at Ruhleben, I have written this volume. I have endeavoured to paint the word picture as faithfully as possible, free from exaggeration and distortion which are likely to be provoked by the blind forces of prejudice and animosity. Even if I have succeeded only in depicting a glimpse of the life, habits, amusements, interests, customs, and activities of the little penned-up Colony of Britishers hard by Berlin, I shall feel that this book has not been written in vain.

HENRY C. MAHONEY.





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# INTERINED IN GERMANY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE ROUND-UP AND INTERNMENT OF THE BRITISH ELEMENT IN GERMANY.

I WAS kicking my heels disconsolately about the city of Cologne—a stranger in a strange land. Alarmed at the serious condition of my health, which had been undermined by privation and confinement, a considerate (?) German Government, in its anxiety not to sully the clean bill of health borne by its internment camp at Sennelager by the death of a *Schweine-hund* Englishman, had released me “on pass,” available only for the Cathedral city beside the Rhine. The authorities had suggested my freedom within the country on *parole*, but as I had emphatically declined to refrain from attempting any escape to England, they had been compelled to extend me merely a permit.

I sought employment, but in vain; the Britisher was at a serious discount in the labour market in those days. Had it not been for the practical sympathy of a compatriot, Walter K——, whom I had first met in Sennelager, and with whom a strong bond of friendship and camaraderie was forged, I really think I should have petitioned the Teuton authorities for my return to *durance vile*, and, if they had refused, undoubtedly should have committed some penal offence, which would have placed me under the protection, such as it was, of a German prison.

K—— was one of those true friends whom one finds when in sore trouble. Having been established for many years in Cologne commercial circles he had suffered only a brief period of incarceration at Sennelager. Upon his release he returned to his business. On the day we parted at the Sennelager camp gates he requested me, if ever in his city, to be certain to look him up and to spend a few days with him. I had taken advantage of this invitation and was residing at his country residence in a picturesque tiny village overlooking the Rhine.

My first anxiety, upon regaining my restricted freedom, was my wife at home. I had left her, three months previously, in a delicate state of health. I was apprehensive as to her welfare. During this period I had not heard a word about her, while she had not heard a word from, or about, me. One circumstance I had particularly dreaded. I had been told that a German newspaper had narrated my death "shot as a spy" after my military trial at Wesel\*, and I hoped against hope that this terrible news, greatly exaggerated as it was, had not reached her.

I made several attempts to get a letter through to home, to apprise her of my whereabouts and experiences, but the German authorities had put their foot down firmly upon the interchange of correspondence. I resorted to several subterfuges, but as I subsequently learned upon my return home, not one of these first efforts succeeded. Either the letters went astray or, what was more probable, owing to the vigilance of the authorities, they were officially intercepted and destroyed.

During this period my friend and I had been perturbed by reading the German newspapers in which the rounding-up of all British aliens in Germany was advocated. One and all vehemently called for drastic action, pointing out that the internment camp which had been established

\*"Sixteen Months in Four German Prisons," pp. 60-73.



at Ruhleben, was the very place for us who were "on pass." The press went on to describe the amenities of the camp, dwelling at length upon the pleasures and amusements, comforts, and what not which had been provided for those already within its walls. Evidently, the papers laid the colours too thickly upon the picture they painted, because a volume of correspondence poured forth from irate patriots protesting against Britishers being pampered, and recommending that we should all be put to some useful work and be induced to realise that we were the prisoners, and not the guests, of the German nation.

The outlook was certainly forbidding. Both K—— and myself confidently anticipated being arrested at any moment. The climax came one evening. Two other compatriots, F—— and R——, also released "on pass" from Sennelager, visited K—— at his home, although their permit was only for Cologne. In this village there was also an important factory managed by three Englishmen. The fact that seven Englishmen planted themselves in this tiny remote suburb prompted the Burgomeister, who knew K—— intimately, to enquire half-jestingly if he, my friend, were contemplating the foundation of an English colony on this spot?

Upon the evening in question these two friends came over. I had arranged to go to the opera with a lady friend. Although the cloud was hanging ominously and closely over our heads I was resolved not to be denied my burst of amusement. Accordingly I left my three compatriots playing cards and exchanging experiences. Coming out of the building upon the conclusion of the performance my attention was arrested by a newspaper placard, announcing the intention of the authorities to intern all those of British nationality at once.

When I reached my friend's house I greeted them with the words: "Buck up boys! We're all going to be clinked to-morrow!"

Animated discussion followed my declaration of the announcement I had seen upon the placard. F—— and R—— were in a quandary. According to the regulations they were compelled to report themselves every day to the authorities in Cologne, because their "passes" confined them to that city. They were out of bounds at K——'s house. The hour was late and they grew apprehensive that they might be caught beyond the jurisdiction of their permit, in which event, needless to say, Teuton system, feeling itself affronted, would have exacted punishment swift and sharp to fit the crime. But they had unduly delayed their return; whether they liked it or not it was impossible for them to get back to the city that evening. So they passed the night with us.

In their anxiety to be back in Cologne in good time in the morning they left us at an early hour. They went direct to the authorities to conform to the regulations. Here they received a smart cold douche. The official curtly ordered them to return home, pack their belongings and to report again in half-an-hour. They seized this brief respite to telephone a warning to us.

K—— at once hustled off to the city to wind up his business, upon the completion of which he returned home to await the inevitable. During the morning, not knowing what was going to happen, I had packed my few belongings, not forgetting the voluminous notes I had prepared during my leisure, and which I treasured somewhat highly, relating to my experiences in previous German prisons.

The blow fell in the afternoon. Two detectives from Cologne were announced. They entered to state that we were both under arrest. From the tenor of the conversation which passed K—— concluded that the round-up was essentially a matter of form. He, himself, from his prolonged residence in the district and commercial connections in the city, expressed the firm conviction that we



should be released "on pass" directly we had conformed with some new regulation or other which had been promulgated. I admired his optimism, but inwardly cherished a contrary opinion. I had occasion to regard Teuton methods in a vastly different light, and did not regard the outlook with any degree of confidence.

Our arrest was not free from its touch of humour, which contrasted strangely with steel-bound German method and system. Both the detectives knew K—— very well. They suggested—after a drink—that we should proceed to the police headquarters in Cologne as unobtrusively as possible. It was necessary first to proceed to the local Burgomeister's office to report, and they expressed their readiness to meet us there by appointment, they in the meanwhile changing from their conspicuous official uniform into mufti.

The appointment was fixed for 6.30. K—— and I, our bags packed with eatables, presented ourselves well before time, only to discover that the three Britishers connected with the local factory had also been coralled and similarly treated. The local formalities completed we trooped off to the city, captors and captives chatting and joking merrily as if the best of friends. Reaching the city we all turned into a restaurant to have a parting dinner, the two detectives slipping quietly to another table so as to disarm all suspicion of being associated with ourselves. The meal completed we resumed our journey, a festive party, until we turned the corner leading to the prison whither we were bound. Directly the building loomed in sight our detectives re-assumed their mask of officialdom, and with rough tongues and brusque manner, hustled us into the presence of Teuton authority.

We were instantly passed on to the cells, where we were told we should have to make ourselves content until our papers came through from the military authorities. But we made light of the experience. K—— stoutly

maintained that within a few hours we should be free to roam Cologne again. But there came the inevitable slip 'twixt the cup and the lip. We did not regain our permits for restricted freedom, but an unsolicited and unappreciated through "pass" to Ruhleben.

While German method and organisation have been paraded before the world *ad nauseam*, and for the most part have been proved to be as empty as the proverbial wind-bag, yet there are one or two characteristics of Prussianism which cannot fail to command attention. The German Government never does things by halves, does not waste its time over idle vapid threatenings, and although it frequently makes mistakes, the errors always happen to the advantage of authority. When Teuton officialdom says a thing is to be done, it is done, and without the slightest delay. The celerity and completeness with which the British element, resident in, and travelling through, the country, was rounded up after the fiat went forth bore this out very conclusively.

Within twelve hours of the publication of the decree every Britisher—except one apparently—was safely placed under lock and key.

It was the comprehensiveness of the round-up which created the greatest measure of astonishment. The authorities were as indiscriminate as they were thorough. The tourist was taken with the man who had been settled in the country for ten, twenty, aye, in some cases, forty years; the millionaire was taken with the pauper; the bank manager with the commercial traveller; the magnate of business with his junior clerk. The governing principle was "Arrest them all; sort them out afterwards."

The round-up was marked by several pathetic incidents. Many men, established in business, upon reading the notice to report themselves on November 6th, anticipated being granted permission to proceed to their offices as usual. But they were rudely disappointed. Directly they had been

identified and docketed they were clapped into prison. They were not even given half an hour's grace to bid farewell to their wives and families ; were not permitted to communicate with their homes by letter or telephone ; and possessed nothing beyond what they stood in. The distress which was created by this merciless method of arrest was far-reaching. Wives wondered what had become of their husbands, and did not learn the truth for several days.

When we reached the prison we found one man, who had been "clinked" in this unceremonious manner crying his eyes out. He had rushed away from a sick wife's bedside to comply with the order, only to be put under lock and key. He pleaded hard for permission to return and say farewell, but his appeal fell upon deaf ears.

Another Britisher similarly answered the call and was imprisoned. He had not a penny in his pocket. One fellow was particularly down-hearted. He had been established for many years in an outfitting business, his partner being a German. The whole of his life's savings were invested in the enterprise, which was prosperous. The authorities swooped down, dragged off the German partner for military service and commandeered the whole of the stock. The Britisher went to the authorities to lodge a protest against the last-named action, only to be flung into the cells at Klingelputz, where we found him. He had lost everything he possessed.

Even more pathetic was the case of an Englishman, a widower, who promptly answered the instruction to report. He received scurvy treatment, being condemned to the cells the moment his identity had been established. With tears in his eyes he explained that he had come in haste, leaving his two children, both of tender age, in the house unattended. Like everyone else he anticipated being permitted to return home after complying with the regulation. He pleaded for permission to return to complete arrangements for his children's guardianship, but the



authorities would not listen to him. He was not even permitted to communicate with his home. His mental condition at this unceremonious treatment, denial of access to his children, and his vague wonderings as to what would become of them, may be better imagined than described. But Prussianism knows not the quality of mercy; Teuton law is inexorable and cannot be softened by sentiment. The hard-heartedness which was manifested by the authorities was directly responsible for much of the misery and distress which subsequently reached such an acute pitch in Ruhleben, especially among those who were without funds.

Upon our transference to prison we kept together—K——, the three British managers from the factory, and myself. While in Klingelputz, which was temporarily over-crowded, I was able to take stock of the permanent residents of this penitentiary, and they were the most hardened gang of ruffians upon which I have ever set eyes, a large number being prisoners who were serving long terms of penal servitude. One prisoner, as he walked the exercise yard, which we overlooked, aroused my earnest attention. He was garbed in the uniform of the Red Cross, and for some time I puzzled my brains as to the reason for his inclusion among the “lifers,” especially in such a dress.

Making enquiries of the gaolers I ascertained that he was colloquially known as “Old Fingers.” What crime had he committed? Oh! he had been caught on the battlefield, not succouring the wounded as his duty ordained, but robbing the dead and dying right and left. He had a penchant for rings, but in his avaricious haste was unable to purloin them in a humane manner. So he had solved the problem by amputating the fingers. He was caught with the goods. When examined his pockets were found to be chock-a-block full of dismembered fingers carrying the jewellery which he coveted. His dastardly action

brought its due reward—fifteen years' penal servitude, and he was compelled to parade the exercise ground in his Red Cross uniform, which he had so abused, as a terrible example to one and all.

The complete cornering of all Britishers speedily provoked complaints from affected German interests. The Teuton owning the factory in the village where I had been residing, came down and loudly wailed that he would have to close his establishment unless his three British employes were released. They were indispensable ; work was at a stand-still ; he was being harried and threatened by the authorities for not turning out the products which were urgently required ; and so on. My three compatriots were highly amused at his discomfiture and, personally, they did not care a snap of the fingers whether he had to close down or not. He appealed pleadingly for their release. Finally, as the three gentlemen concerned concluded that the pure air of the outer world was preferable to the oppressive atmosphere of our cell, their release was discussed. But they were not disposed to go out alone. K—— was just as respected a citizen of Cologne as themselves, and then K—— turned round and said I would have to come too, and offered to be responsible for my good behaviour.

This wholesale request rather staggered the authorities, but there was no other way out, and forthwith things went forward merrily in our favour. Suddenly we were called out and were informed that we were to be allowed our freedom "on pass" as before. Two gendarmes stepped forward to escort us to the Polizei Präsidium, the local equivalent of our Scotland Yard, to receive our papers. It was a lively walk from one building to the other. We were compelled to pass through the market-place, which at the time was crowded. Directly the citizens spotted us the loud cry went up "*Schweine-hund Engländer*" and we were greeted with hisses and cat-calls, the animosity against the British being at fever heat.

Another exasperating hiatus in connection with the steel tape-bound official regulations arose. Our papers had not come from Coblenz, the administrative military centre, as they ought to have done, and we should have to wait in the cells until they had been re-dispatched and received through the correct military channel. As several days were certain to be occupied in this duty we realised that our undoing was now complete. We could not escape internment. Within a couple of hours the prison van drove up, and we were re-transferred to Klingelputz, preparatory to our immediate dispatch to Ruhleben.

At 4.30 the following morning we were roused and roughly bidden to dress quickly. This was no easy matter seeing that our cell was lighted only by the fitful flickerings of a single oil lamp. We were paraded, counted and re-counted until our brains began to whirl. Then, no man being missing apparently, we were formed up, with what belongings we had, and under a strong armed escort, were marched to the station. Although the hour was early a multitude of people had turned out to gaze upon the unusual spectacle of several hundred British civilian prisoners being marched off in custody. It was a listless crowd ; the people looked at us sullenly, but did not raise any dissentient cries. We turned into the station about 8 a.m. and were bundled straightway into the train, to make ourselves as comfortable as we could, which required some effort on our part seeing that the carriages were devoid of all heating arrangements, although it was a typical raw, depressing November morning. After being cooped-up for an hour the train started on its long pull to Ruhleben, *via* Hanover, and I do not think that journey will ever be forgotten by any of the luckless Britishers who were aboard.

As was always the case when British prisoners were forced to make a railway journey, we were not provided with any food or even water *en route*. German organisation does not take commissariat into consideration under such



conditions. Those of us who had observed the precaution to stock our pockets and baggage with provender for "Little Mary" fared satisfactorily; but there were many who had no reserves at all. The wise shared their stocks as far as they could with the foolish, but there was scarcely enough to go round. One or two of our guards, out of sympathy, also divided their humble supplies with the prisoners, but for the most part our escort completely ignored us. When we stopped at a station, even those who had no food but had money with which they were prepared to patronise the restaurant, found themselves balked in any attempt to satisfy their cravings.

It is not surprising that one or two of the party fainted from hunger and the stifling air within the crowded carriages, but they received no attention. At one station a man in distress persuaded his guard to make some purchase for him. But as the guard was returning with the victuals he was accosted by an officer. When the latter estimable gentleman learned the true destination of the edibles he promptly threw them to the ground and kicked them hither and thither.

Before we reached Hanover one of the party collapsed. The train drew up at the station platform, and seeing a party of German women wearing the uniform of the Red Cross we approached them and offered a mark—one shilling—for a basin of water to revive our comrade. When these young ladies discovered that the water was only required for a *Schweine-hund Engländer* they threw the water on to the platform, spat in the man's face, and turned on their heels. But they kept the money, doubtless as a contribution to the German Red Cross Fund!

The journey was exasperatingly slow, the train being compelled frequently to slow down, pull up, and to switch into sidings to permit the military trains to pass. Consequently the clock notched 9 p.m. before we pulled into Hanover. We had been cooped up like ducks for eleven

hours, while we had been astir since 4.30 that morning. It was a sad and depressing train-load of outraged humanity which blinked its eyes, yawned, gibed, and cursed as it surveyed the misty platforms of the station. By this time all topics of conversation had been worn threadbare. We had whiled the time away discussing our future and speculating upon the highly lauded amenities and comforts which awaited us at Ruhleben.

Curiously enough, while the majority of the party resident in Germany knew Ruhleben by reputation from its association with trotting and racing, no one except a young know-all had ever been there. This exception treated us to very attractive pictures. He had trotted on the track, confidently assured us that we should see life in real earnest, and that we should have plenty to amuse, entertain, and instruct us among the horses, riders, and jockeys. Twenty-four hours later one or two of us were looking high and low for this optimist, shrieking for his scalp! However, the general concensus of opinion was that our stay in the camp was merely a matter of form; that we should all be released within a couple of months. Truly hope springs eternal in the human breast, especially when one is in the hands of the Germans.

At 12 p.m. the train resumed its tedious journey. About 6 a.m. the following morning we reached the much vaunted Camp of Promise. I really believe the Clerk of the Weather must have been mourning for us, because it was damp, cold, and miserable, as well as dark. Our arrival had evidently been expected, because as we approached the internment camp we observed a large crowd of the prisoners already in occupation gathered around the entrance. They gave a lusty cheer when they caught sight of us, and pressed forward eagerly. But half-a-dozen or more bayonets flashed angrily and beat them back.

As we filed into the camp the enquiry went up:

"Hello Boys! Where are you from?"



"Klingelputz!" we bawled in reply.

"How long were you there?"

"Only a few days! Who are you?"

"The 'K.G.'s."

The answer came in a unanimous roar uttered with such vehemence as to startle our guards.

"'K.G.'s'?" we repeated puzzled. "What's that?"

"*The Kaiser's Guests!* Come along! You'll soon understand!"

In extending their triumphant welcome to us one and all raised his tin bowl above his head. As we drew up we saw inscribed in large characters on the side of each bowl, according to official instructions, the two letters "K.G." I might mention that these mystic letters stand for *Kriegs Gefangenen*—prisoner of war—but the irrepressible Britisher had promptly adapted them to his own satisfaction. Every man in Ruhleben was facetiously dubbed as being the "Kaiser's Guest!"

## CHAPTER II.

### THE HOME OF THE "K.G.'s."

STANDING shivering for an hour in that raw marrow-chilling and damp November morning did not seem an inviting introduction to our new home, nor appear to be a happy augury for our future welfare. I could not refrain from thinking that at home we are far more solicitous for the health of our hardened gaol-birds at Dartmoor and other penal establishments, than German militarism was disposed towards us, whose only crime was that we were of British nationality. We stamped our feet in the slush, and vigorously swung our arms in desperate efforts to beat some warmth into our quivering bodies. Then an Englishman, the Captain of the Camp, strode up and piloted us to the quarters which were to be our home for so many dreary months, aye, years, to come.

And what quarters! A Britisher has more concern for his dog than had the unemotional Teuton for the helpless alien in his grasp. It is difficult to convey a convincing picture of the eligible residential situation, but one might very reasonably compare the racecourse at Epsom with that at Ruhleben. The latter is every whit as exposed and certainly quite as dreary, but lacking picturesqueness. Upon the occasion of a big race-meeting, when the course was flanked with throngs of gaily attired rank and fashion, the *elite* of Berlin society, upon a brilliant summer's day, no doubt

it did present an animated, inviting and gay aspect. But in the murky dawn of that grey and drab November morning it was about as attractive as a muck-heap.

It was not as if the internment camp roamed over the whole racecourse. At that time the British prisoners were penned into a small corner—the Paddock—with the Grand Stand, shorn of all its festiveness, thrown in as a kind of make-weight. The racecourse and trotting track were railed off. As we surveyed the low rambling buildings we wondered where our living quarters were installed. Conceive our amazement when we learned that we were to shake down and make ourselves at home in the buildings which had been erected to accommodate the horses and their provender overhead—in other words, the small horse-boxes and the hay lofts!

Upon entering the camp, and at the first glimpse of the depressing surroundings, we four—K——, F——, R——, and myself—resolutely decided to stick together come what might. Possibly we should be able to extract a measure of comfort out of our own company, while the fact that K—— was fluent in the tongue was a distinct advantage.

Reaching Barrack 5, which was assigned to us, we moved into one of the horse-boxes which we discovered to be vacant. While it still reeked with the pungent aroma incidental to a stable, and fresh manure was still clinging to the walls—we heard that its legitimate owner had only been withdrawn a short time previously—we unanimously voted it to be preferable to the confined space overhead. We threw down our belongings and were about to make ourselves comfortable when another party of prisoners bustled up and dumped their baggage as they exclaimed:

"You must get out of this!"

"That be hang'd for a tale! Why?"

"It has been allotted to us!"

Our jaws dropped. Although we deeply resented being evicted so summarily, thinking that those first on the ground were entitled to their pitch, we cleared out with the best grace we could muster. This experience caused us to make enquiries. To our amazement we learned that prisoners flush of funds benefited at the expense of their poorer brethren. The sites were sold as if they were freeholds, and we were told that in some instances as much as £5 had been paid for a horse-box. This sale of living quarters created intense discontent, especially when it was learned that the transactions represented a good round sum in the aggregate. We had a very shrewd suspicion as to who profited from this deplorable practice, and it is one of the issues which the more progressive prisoners took up in grim earnest. But in the very early days such pernicious methods were only too rife. At a later date, after things had been straightened out, such penalising of the less fortunate members was sternly suppressed.

Ejected from the horse-box we wound our way up a creaking ramshackle staircase, which threatened to give way under our weight, leading to the "flat" above. We blundered through the narrow door and then pulled up dead. The interior was as black and as forbidding as a coal-hole. It was some minutes before our eyes became accustomed to the Stygian gloom, and then we descried upon the floor a seething, struggling, misshapen mass of humanity, tumbling and jostling restlessly for elbow-room in which to settle down.

The loft was some 70 yards long by 9 yards wide, and divided into two sections, A and B. The roof sloped sharply, bringing the space between the floor and the rafters at the walls to between 3 ft. 6 ins. and 4 ft. 6 ins., while in the centre it was about 7 ft. Down the centre of the space ran the gangway, which was about four feet in width. The beds, or rather the spaces allotted for sleeping, were



set transversely on either side of the gangway, two feet to each man, with the head against the wall. The result was that each occupant had to crawl into the central gangway to dress and undress, because he dared not rise in his bed unless he was content to crack his head against the roof.

There was no ventilation whatever; natural light struggled through holes in the roof and cracks in the wall, but as the draughts through these interstices caused one's hair to stand on end they were promptly chinked with paper. The floor was of stone and at that time of the year as cold as one of ice. No heating apparatus had been installed—this came later upon the strong recommendation of the American Ambassador. Some idea of the bitterly repelling cold in this loft during the winter, may be gathered from a practical joke we played upon one of our number. We filled a tin with water, suspended it from a rafter by a string over his bed, our intention being to discharge the contents when he was asleep. The tin hung in this position for a quarter-of-an-hour. We pulled the string, but to our surprise, the water, although the tin was canted, refused to come out. Examination proved the water to have been transformed into a solid block of ice, and that within fifteen minutes!

We strove to force our way into the loft but had to give it up. The prisoners already in possession were huddled and crowded together striving to profit from the warmth radiated from one another's bodies. They were all spent, the fatigue from twenty hours in the train having bowled them over. They had discarded their baggage pell-mell; to move was to invite a bark of the shins, a vicious kick from one who had been trampled upon, or collision with a rafter. We cast around and found only one eligible spot "to let," capable of receiving four men. We squatted upon it, but within a few hours discovered why these few square feet of vacant space had failed to claim an owner.

The site was too near the door, through which the wind whistled with the ferocity of a tornado.

After we had secured our quarters we were again hustled and commanded to fetch an armful of straw, which we were ordered to scatter loosely upon the floor. This was our couch! Needless to say the quantity served out was so meagre as to offer no comfort when reclining, while it was not of sufficient thickness to prevent the cold from the stone striking through to our bodies. It was not until the American Ambassador inspected our quarters and detected the crudeness of our shake-down we were given boards, placed an inch or two above the floor, to serve as beds, and thus were able to receive some relief. Until then we had to make ourselves as cosy as we could, snuggling down into the straw like pigs in a sty, and packing closely together to keep warm. Even then we dared not remove our garments, and, so far as I was concerned, three months elapsed before I could shed my attire for a night's rest.

How we passed the first night it is impossible to relate. The inky blackness of the loft prevented one from moving once he had secured his quarters. The silence of the night was broken by groans, mumblings, and sobbings from the distraught sleepers, dreaming of home or lying awake, too cold to woo sleep, and ruminating upon their unfortunate plight. Owing to the absence of ventilation and the cramped quarters—400 of us were stowed within this confined space—the condition of the atmosphere within the loft must be left to the imagination. It was stagnant and foetid to a degree which cannot be described. When one awoke in the morning it was to find one's mouth distended and as dry as tinder. When at last one did persuade the saliva to perform its functions the palate revolted. The members of the party to which I belonged dreaded the effects of the action of the repulsive atmosphere, and our first thought upon waking was to flush our mouths

with permanganate of potash, of which we had a small stock.

We were tossing and struggling fitfully when there came the clank of heavily shod feet. A raucous voice bawled :

"Get up ! Get up !"

It was the guard. We woke, endeavoured to pierce the inky pall, wondering what was the matter, thinking it was only midnight, but to our surprise learned that it was six o'clock, at which hour all prisoners had to tumble out.

With an effort we struggled to our feet and then bestirred ourselves to perform our morning ablutions. But we could not find any water, far less conveniences for washing operations. We pestered the guard but it was like worrying a hitching-post for information. Finally somebody alighted upon two taps in the alleyway between the horse-boxes downstairs. This was the only service available. There was a mad rush towards these taps, but the struggling crowd could not all wash at once, so we formed up in a long queue. When 400 men desired to perform this essential operation it will be seen that the string assumed a somewhat formidable length, while, as we had to parade within thirty minutes, the task had to be performed very hurriedly and perfunctorily. In fact, since German system waits for nothing, parade was often called before many of the men had succeeded in getting within arm's reach of the tap, and they had to dispense with the washing duty by bustling off to get their meal !

And what a wash ! The water was icy. German hygiene did not go to the extent of providing soap. It was apparently an unknown necessity. Throughout the many months I was in Ruhleben the authorities never provided anyone with a single ounce of soap. We had to buy what we wanted in this line from the canteen, and we were mulcted somewhat heavily for an article which was only soap because it was so-called. Towels were another

item concerning which the Germans entertained very primitive ideas. A few coarse towels, more reminiscent of sections of canvas than anything else, were distributed among 400 men! Fortunately the majority of us were equipped with our own conveniences in this respect and we clung tenaciously to them. As it was hopelessly impossible for the whole of us to have a wash in the short period allowed between reveille and the summons to parade, the more enterprising tried the expedient of rising earlier, so as to be at the taps in good time. But this energy was misplaced and resulted in a commotion. The noise awoke those accommodated in the horse-boxes and they voiced a vigorous protest. Things grew ugly over this bone of contention, causing the authorities eventually to intervene, with the result that no one was permitted to steal a wash before the official hour for rising—that is, unless he was so stealthy as to fulfil his desire without rousing his august comrades resident in the eminently desirable residential horse-boxes.

We paraded in the chilly dawn and then were marched to the kitchen for our matutinal meal. In those days the Germans were undoubtedly apprehensive that the more daring among us might make a bold bid for liberty. To check this tendency they counted us at every trick and turn. Woebetide us if the roll call should be deficient through a laggard. Then we were kept standing in the cold while a spirited search was conducted for the missing prisoner.

We received further shock upon this first parade for meals. German system revealed another shortcoming. There were insufficient bowls to go round among us. However, by dint of perspiring diligence, the guard raked out a few repulsive tins which they distributed among us to remedy the deficiency. At a later date they provided us with white earthenware basins, and ordered us to take every care of them. If we broke this utensil we were



mulcted to the tune of 40 pfennings—4d.—for a replacement, and were solemnly warned to surrender it before we left the camp. So far as I am personally concerned I am indebted to the German Government to the value of one basin, because, immediately prior to my departure, when I learned that I should not require the bowl any longer, I hurled it at a practical joker's head, only to miss my objective, with the result that the basin came to grief against the wall of the horse-box in which I was then residing.

We were a motley dejected procession slouching through the mud and slush to the kitchen. It was a dismal, bitterly cold trudge of about half a mile. When we reached the establishment we were halted and had to hang about until another barrack, already lined up, had been served. It was not until each of those 400 men had received his humble dole that we could approach. Seeing that only one man was served at a time as he filed by, some idea of the delay we encountered may be conceived. The facilities provided at the kitchen were totally inadequate to cope expeditiously and sufficiently for our needs. It was equipped with only three boilers.

As we filed by the "chef" he ladled us a spoonful of repulsive black acorn coffee devoid of both milk and sugar. That was all. We were only given a loaf of forbidding black bread every other day, and that had to be eked out through six meals. The bread itself was abominable, even from the earliest days. We often discussed its composition and the number, as well as the variety, of the ingredients involved in its preparation, but we never succeeded in fathoming the riddle to our satisfaction. A loaf was certainly a surprise packet, as I describe in a subsequent chapter.

But we were not furnished with the foregoing bread ration for very long. It was reduced to one-sixth of a loaf per man per day—perhaps! Such a meagre repast did not

occupy appreciable time to discuss. While some of the prisoners valiantly hurried back to their barrack to drink the liquid under cover, others, preferring it steaming hot, braved the cutting wind and squatted upon the seats of the Grand Stand. After breakfast, there being nothing else to do, we either lounged around the corners, exchanging experiences, speculating upon our future, or busied ourselves in our quarters in an heroic effort to kill time. Many threw themselves down on their crude couches to mope and reflect upon the unhappy conditions.

At twelve o'clock we were again lined up, this time to proceed to the kitchen for our midday meal, which was served out between 11.45 and 12.45. Each man proceeded with his basin tucked under one arm while his other hand clutched his hunk of bread. We were given about 12 ounces of soup, which, in the early days, while certainly deficient in quality, was yet palatable. Pea-soup was the favourite, garnished on rare occasions with microscopical shreds of meat and pieces of bone, chasing which round the basin offered a trifle of recreation to liven the dinner hour.

The afternoon was whiled away after the manner of the morning. Killing time in those days constituted the most depressing feature of our existence. It was impossible to indulge in a brisk walk, as we were herded too closely together, while the surface of the ground was churned into a sea of mud and slush beneath the pattering of 4,000 pairs of feet. Some of us, growing tired at the lack of occupation, finally decided to indulge in games. But where could we obtain the essentials? The camp was unable to yield the slightest contribution. Determined to enjoy a little diversion we routed out a few rags and some odd lengths of string. From these materials we contrived a primitive rag ball, and then we let ourselves go at rounders with the ardour of schoolboys. This was the first diversion introduced to the camp and it proved a great success, becoming increasingly popular, when, by some manner of



BARRACK 5 LINED UP AT THE KITCHEN WAITING FOR THEIR CABBAGE SOUP.

Author marked with a cross.





means, a prisoner succeeded in getting a rubber ball brought in from Berlin. It was not until later that we were able to gratify our desire to indulge in football, though we relieved the monotony of rounders by kicking our rag ball hither and thither.

In this way we passed the afternoon until five o'clock came round. Again we had to line up to proceed to the kitchen for our evening and last meal of the day. This was merely a repetition of the morning meal, namely, a ladleful of acorn coffee, without milk and sugar, which, with a small piece of black bread, constituted our "stayer" until the next morning. This was the menu day after day. It never varied except for an indifferent ringing of the changes upon the soup and the circumstance that, as time went on, the quantity diminished while the quality deteriorated. Not a very nourishing diet one will opine, and certainly not one which was destined to keep us in the best of spirits or prime physical condition. But seeing that we were merely *Schweine-hund Englander*—a favourite description by the way—it did not matter.

I have already mentioned that our quarters were devoid of all ventilation, even during the day. We certainly kept the entrance door open as much as we dared, but it was of little avail, inasmuch as it was impossible to establish a circulation of air. The result was that the atmosphere within the loft became stagnant and grew more foetid, nauseating and revolting as the respirations and exhalations from the bodies of 400 men became associated with the pungent aroma arising from stale soup, which some of the prisoners harboured in their quarters, foul stench ascending from the straw, which became associated with mud and filth brought in from outside, and other noisome odours which cannot be mentioned. The wonder is that disease did not secure a foothold among us. It was only by unremitting attention upon our own part that such a calamity was averted.

The winter evenings dragged wearily. The only light permitted in the loft was a small oil lamp—in the early days we were not even conceded this comfort—which threw fitful flickerings over the gloomy cavern and cast ghostly shadows upon the roof. Even the lamp appeared to be ashamed of the space which it was called upon to illumine, and invariably betrayed a more pronounced inclination to expire than to burn, while the smell of the burning oil did not improve the sweetness of the atmosphere, which, in the course of a few days, had become so strong that it would have supported hat-pegs driven into it !

At nine o'clock came the curt order "lights out." We were forced to shake down as well as we could upon the thinly covered stone floor, lying face to face and huddled closely to keep one another warm. But very few, even the most hardened, could readily woo sleep unless utterly exhausted. Groans, curses, invective, sobs, and moanings about home and those who were waiting wonderingly and patiently rent the air, and became so distressing as to cause those of sterner metal to get up and pace the floor to occupy their thoughts, dodging the rafters overhead and the heterogeneous distributed baggage on the floor. One dreaded the coming of night, and, when it did come round, longingly sighed for the following dawn.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE CITIZENS OF RUHLEBEN.

AT the time I was forcibly conducted to Ruhleben the Internment Camp was under the control of the military authorities, and a pretty state of affairs prevailed, the soldiers asserting their authority at every trick and turn in an over-bearing manner. At a later date supervision was transferred to the Civil Authorities, which change brought many welcome benefits.

The responsible Governor of the camp was Graf Scherein, an aged, white-haired symbol of German militarism, for whom evidently the post had been created, seeing that he was too advanced in years for active service. So far as he was personally concerned we could lodge no complaint. He was as sympathetic as he dared to be, and certainly did not belong to the predominating *Gott strafe England* coterie. He frequently visited us, invariably accompanied by a lady, who was equally solicitous over our welfare. I have not the slightest doubt but that he would have alleviated our condition very much had it been left to his discretion, but he was merely a cog in the diamond steel machine generally described as German "Kultur," and was compelled to abide by the regulations. Whenever we levied a complaint, provided it was well-founded, he would have it remedied so far as he dared. On one occasion I considered the midday dole of soup to be an outrage and did not hesitate to ferret him out

and to produce the liquid in support of my "grouse." I urged him to taste it. He did so, and agreed with me to such an extent as to proceed to the kitchen forthwith to order it to be improved. And it was. But we could have raised a legitimate complaint every day, and so at last we grew tired of enlisting the Governor's intercession on our behalf.

Graf Scherein was passionately fond of music. When we got the camp going and introduced concerts and theatrical performances he invariably honoured us with his company, often bringing friends with him. He would listen intently, applaud us enthusiastically, and compliment us warmly upon our efforts to lighten life in the camp. Time after time I have seen the tears stream down his cheeks as he listened to music beautifully rendered, both vocal and instrumental, while he would shake his head sadly in commiseration.

But unfortunately for us he was too aged to pursue his task actively. The greater part of the many and complex duties were assumed by a younger man, Baron von Taube.

Among the minor officers was the Chief Censor, who fulfilled a very difficult task in a laudable manner. He was always ready to do his utmost for us. If we were in doubt as to whether a certain communication would be admissible in a letter to home, he would willingly extend his advice, and was always disposed to stretch a point to our advantage. Not that it always succeeded, because we discovered from experience that many letters which met with his approval were subsequently intercepted by someone else at Berlin. Unfortunately his superiors resented his pro-British sympathies and finally removed him from office. Then there was the chief of the Guard, and, last, but by no means least, the official doctor attached to the camp, of whom I have something to say in a subsequent chapter.



Each barrack was presided over by an under-officer and a private. They were accommodated in two rooms between horse-boxes on the ground floor, and were held responsible for the conduct of each building. Owing to this under-guard being frequently changed we were kept in a condition of constant uneasiness. While some of the warders were disposed to be lenient and to wink their eye at this or that, "refraining from interfering until necessity actually compelled, others were martinets, watched us vigilantly, and swooped down at the slightest departure from the rules and regulations. The private was the butt of his officer's spite and he promptly vented his spleen upon us. One private I shall never forget. He was a typical ignorant Teuton country yokel. He could not count except in the most rudimentary manner.

As may be imagined, seeing that we had been drawn from every conceivable strata of the social scale, we were an extremely cosmopolitan crowd. Only in two instances might the barracks be said to have been homogeneous, although even in these two cases there was the same aspect of the highest rubbing elbows with the lowest. Thus Barrack 8 was tenanted for the most part by sailors, taken from the British ships detained in German harbours upon the outbreak of war, and subsequently transferred to Ruhleben from the hulks at Hamburg. Barrack 6 was known as the "Jews' Barrack," from the circumstances that it was occupied by the members of this fraternity. But the remaining barracks—eleven barracks and a tea-house in all were provided for our accommodation in the first instance, although their number was increased later—were inhabited by a mixed assembly.

Naturally the citizens of the camp speedily sorted themselves out into small parties of similar temperament, social position, and tastes. That to which I belonged was increased from four to six through F—— discovering two young fellows about eighteen years of age. One came

from Hunstanton, while the other is the son of a prominent man of commerce in the City of London. Subsequently our party became reduced to five, one of the number becoming so unpopular as to be summarily drummed out.

Strange human sights may be seen in every city of the world, but I do not think any could compare with those presented during those dismal days in Ruhleben camp. We were given the use of a small stretch of ground facing the Grand Stand, and this speedily developed into the promenade, or, as it was facetiously styled, the "Row." Every morning, between the hours of ten and twelve, it was the one place where the rank and fashion of Ruhleben might be seen in full plumage.

And what a parade! Down at heel, ragged 'Erbert, his face concealed beneath a mangy-looking accumulation of hair, rubbed shoulders with D'Arcy, who was still striving desperately to create a sensation with his immaculate morning coat, corduroy trousers tied under the knee, and patent boots, rather the worse for rough and tumble, but still clinging to his feet owing to the liberal use of string. Others, without coats to their names, shuffled along in improvised clogs. Many would have given a Weary Willie a long start so far as that tired work-shy look and raggedness were concerned, and then have beaten him. A Britisher from overseas, when he first caught sight of this motley crowd taking exercise, would instantly have dubbed it the "Hoboes' Hobble," and the description would have been most apt.

One of our colleagues aroused especial attention. Rumour said he was a member of the British aristocracy, but in Ruhleben in the early days it was difficult to deduce the standing of a man from his appearance. Internment was a mighty leveller. The Cockney who had done his period of "time" was scarcely distinguishable from a "knut" of the finest water. But there was something

about this particular prisoner which commanded respect. While he was seen freely about the camp he seemed to be sadly out of joint with the strange surroundings. His clothes still preserved that distinctive Bond Street cut, he maintained his undoubted aristocratic and characteristic intonation and mannerisms. But the feature which attracted the greatest measure of attention was his monocle. He was generally admired, being dubbed by one and all as a thorough sport. While his bearing and voice were mimicked mercilessly it was with the utmost good-nature and no one seemed to enjoy the banter more than himself. The few occasions when he presented himself in the line at the kitchen, with his basin under one arm and clinging to his chunk of bread with the other hand, created good-humoured hilarity and he was irreverently "chi-iked." But he took it all in a spirit which commanded respect and when chipped invariably retorted with a broad knowing smile.

He acted as if he really did enjoy the unusual experience, and this contributed to his popularity. He accepted the banter in the spirit in which it was given—namely, something out of the ordinary and merely assumed to sustain our *esprit de corps*—and he was always ready to extend practical assistance to anyone who was in difficulty, so long as it was kept quiet by the person affected. He sedulously avoided all publicity and, all things considered, did an enormous amount of good by stealth.

The sequel was rather interesting. Some months after my return from Germany I received a letter from a country seat near Newcastle. The writer expressed himself as being intensely interested in the question of repatriating the British prisoners interned in Germany, and invited me to his home to discuss the subject from a prisoner's point of view.

I kept the appointment and in due course arrived at the family home. Conceive my surprise when I discovered



that it was the ruling member of an old established family who was so deeply interested in the welfare of our compatriots in Ruhleben, he who had provided us with so much amusement, and who had always been ready to assist those in distressed circumstances. My surprise, however, can be readily explained—in the camp names were meaningless.

In the very beginning the camp divided itself into three broad groups—the Optimists, the Pessimists, and the Rumourists. The two first-named would get into argument which would grow lively. The Optimists certainly regarded the situation through rosy-coloured glasses, and for a long time consistently maintained that our release was imminent. The Pessimists were every whit as emphatic that all was up; that they would never see their homes again; that one and all were doomed to be shot down in the last extremity—in short, that they might just as well be dead as alive. When the Optimists, from the uneventful passage of the months and the absence of all signs of their prognostications ever being fulfilled at last began to waver, the Pessimists grew proportionately more triumphant. In fact, they went about the camp with the “All-is-lost” look indelibly stamped upon their faces, while their company was about as congenial as a sovereign would be to a starving man marooned upon an ice-floe.

But the Rumourists were the *bête noire* of the whole camp. A rigid press censorship tends to give Mother Gossip plenty of rope in a crowded city, but this Old Dame never had such a fine time as in the camp at Ruhleben. Her chatter flew hither and thither as thickly as leaves before the autumn blast. No sooner was one story scotched or killed than half-a-dozen equally wild got going. At last things reached such a pass, and so disconcerted the rational, level-headed members of the community, as to compel them to take the situation in hand and to deal with these fantastic intelligence disseminators in a peculiarly

drastic and effective manner as narrated in a subsequent chapter.

Among those who had been summarily corralled and drafted to this internment camp were one or two personalities who commanded more than evanescent attention. One was a London barman, a typical Cockney. He had contracted the *wanderlust* while serving in his uneventful profession of drawing mugs of four ale down East End way, and had made up his mind to see Germany or die. Thereupon he had invested his capital of twelve shillings in a safety bicycle, and with nothing beyond an abundance of "nerve" had struck the Continent. He had spent his time among the first-class hotels and evidently had impressed the Teutonic Boniface fraternity with the romance of his resolution to see the country in this unorthodox manner. He had armed himself with a press album in which he had sedulously pasted all the newspaper comments concerning his journey, and at each hotel had prevailed upon the proprietor to attach his signature and the insignia of his hostelry to this album. He was travelling in high style in this inexpensive manner when war supervened. He was arrested, together with his trusty steed, and in due course arrived at Ruhleben, where his "twelve bob bike," aroused considerable interest. Incidentally it provided the members of the camp with a certain measure of amusement, the owner willingly permitting the diversion for a consideration. I should imagine from the rush which ensued for the bicycle that the owner speedily recouped his initial outlay. He further improved the shining hour by permitting all who felt so disposed to peruse his press-cutting album at a penny a time!

Another individual went under the sobriquet of "Peanuts," from his outburst of enterprise. He was a darkie from Sierra Leone, invested his capital in the familiar nut, and hawked them from barrack to barrack. Two other darkies who provided the camp with infinite amusement were



Dick and Joe. One had been making a living by dubious means for some years in Berlin and was about the most unblushing liar one could ever hope to meet. Still, his fun and love for practical joking, even when it turned against himself, and so long as it was not pushed to extreme limits, rendered him a favourite.

Others included J——, a well-known golfer, P—— and B——, two eminent footballers, G.L., the accomplished Australian violinist, whose prowess with his instrument whiled away many a weary hour and constituted an unfailing attraction among the Germans themselves, and S——, the popular athletic trainer.

But here and there the advantage of having friends at Court in powerful German circles was brought home to us very vividly. Among those who were coralled was a British trainer. He was a protégé of the King of Wurtemberg. This individual was persuaded to change his national coat. Upon becoming Germanised, he was instantly released, his stay in the camp lasting only a matter of hours. One or two other prominent members of Berlin society among us were also similarly tempted, but they resolutely refused to buy freedom at such a price, and, accordingly, are still languishing in the camp.

Among the 4,000 odd citizens was a small party which aroused universal pity. It comprised two Russian women, whose ages were about thirty and thirty-five respectively, with three young children. These were the only women in the camp and they felt sadly out of place among such an overwhelming masculine population. But every man-jack considered it his bounden duty to mount watch and ward over these unhappy women. They were given one small room, partitioned off from the remainder of a horse-box, between them. The children were of tender age, one indeed being scarcely able to walk.

The fact that these two women and two of the children had to present themselves at the kitchen along with us

to receive their dole of food, grated on our nerves. I recall one morning in particular. The ground was covered with snow and slush. The moon was shining brightly and the air was terribly biting. As we rounded a bend in the road we saw ahead of us, silhouetted sharply against the sky, the forms of these two shivering women, two children, a hunchback, and an old man with a wooden leg, trudging laboriously kitchen-wards. It was such a pitiable sight that we all burst out into derisive laughter, and taunted our guards with being hard up for prisoners to intern such harmless creatures as these.

But a few minutes later our merriment was abruptly and completely silenced. When the women and children reached the kitchen they discovered that they had not brought the official basin allotted to each. Instead of the "chef" giving the women a double portion to divide among the children, this despicable individual, in the might of his authority and saturated as he was with Prussian red-tape, curtly ordered the women to go back and fetch the basin. The hapless wretches were shivering with the cold, while the children, likewise feeling the effects of the weather, were crying pitiablely. The two women looked pleadingly at the chef but they might just as well have tried to soften the Sphinx with their eyes. Back they had to trudge wearily to their quarters to fetch the missing basin. Upon re-presenting themselves at the kitchen they were vehemently berated for being late, as well as being threatened with dire penalties if such a breach of the regulations occurred again. There was not a man among us who would not have cheerfully parted with his portion had he dared and had already received it, to have extricated those poor women from their pitiable dilemma. Some time later these women disappeared—transferred to another camp—and we only hoped that they had been placed amid more congenial surroundings and company and were destined to receive more considerate treatment.

One note of tragedy was sounded. Shortly after my arrival two Belgian civil prisoners were brought in. They had been arrested in one of the towns which was ravaged during the German advance. Happening to hear that one of the twain could narrate a vivid story concerning the German atrocities I ferretted him out and we had a long conversation. He related such a revolting story of rapine and bloodshed as would be difficult to parallel. Indeed, his details of the atrocities which he had seen and heard with his own eyes and ears were so astounding and so incredible that I carefully committed them to paper, and suggested that he should append his name to the statement. He was perfectly agreeable, but contended that no pen could do adequate justice to the rape, torture, mutilation, and murder meted out to his unfortunate compatriots by the exasperated German soldiery.

When I submitted the statement to him he ran through it, but urged me to make certain alterations before he attached his signature, since he was determined to be precise even to the most minute details. I could not undertake this revision there and then, inasmuch as work of this character had to be carried out surreptitiously in the seclusion of one's own quarters, when authority was engaged elsewhere. To have been caught with any notes in one's possession would have incurred most savage punishment.

The alterations were duly made and then I endeavoured to seek him out again. But to my chagrin he was not available. His companion stated that the guard had suddenly turned him out of his barrack and had handed him over to an imposing military escort, and that they had left the camp. Where he had gone no one knew. I felt keenly disappointed at being deprived of what would have been most damning evidence of the German brutalities in Belgium, but the misfortune could not be remedied. In the course of a few days the man was forgotten.



The sequel unnerved the strongest among us who had listened to the Belgian's terrible story. One morning his colleague, who was still with us, received a small parcel of comforts. While unwrapping the contents his attention was arrested by a small paragraph in a fragment of newspaper to the effect that Mrs. — (the wife of our former fellow-prisoner), wished to extend her grateful thanks to the many friends who had sent floral tributes in memory of her husband, who had been cruelly done to death by the Germans. The fragment containing this depressing announcement was torn from one of the Belgian newspapers mysteriously published at that time, which even the vigilant oppressors could not suppress. The remaining Belgian, terrified at the news thus accidentally gleaned, resolutely refused to open his mouth any further concerning the atrocities, fearing that he might share a similar fate. It was not until later that we happened to hear that the Germans, acting upon the precept that "Dead men tell no tales," and evidently regarding this unfortunate man as dangerous, had taken him back to the town in which he had been arrested, and in which he had witnessed the atrocities in question, and had subjected him to a farcical trial which culminated in his death. How he was executed we never knew, but the incident was sufficiently exemplary to induce us to display more than usual wariness concerning our conversation in the camp.

Yet one or two of our fellow prisoners afforded us a measure of amusement. There was one who felt his position most keenly and who steadfastly refrained from making the best of things. He was rarely seen, preferring the seclusion of his barrack quarters. When he did venture among us he walked to and fro with his hands clasped behind his back, and his eyes glued to the ground. He scarcely ever ventured a word. His barrack comrades informed us that he spent the hours writing poetry during the daytime, committing it to memory, and carefully tearing the

fragments of paper into tiny pieces before retiring, evidently in fear that their discovery upon his person might incriminate him, and bring punishment swift and dreadful upon his poor head. But his comrades did not appreciate his lyrics. They were far from feeling romantic or sentimental under the depressing conditions which prevailed at Ruhleben. Still they were forbearing; they attributed the outbreak to the rapid approach of spring, when poets are generally credited with bursting unrestrainedly into song.

Whenever we had the opportunity to burst into a sing-song we did so with rare gusto. Some of the prisoners possessed excellent voices, and it was this gift which subsequently brought about the formation of glee-singing, choral, and other musical parties. But in the early days we amused ourselves with *al fresco* and improvised concerts, and when we got seriously to work in this line the guards used to hang round us listening intently and watching us with mouths agape. It was something which they could not understand, and sometimes the more inquisitive would ask how it was that we could let ourselves go so wholeheartedly when we were languishing in prison.

This penchant for singing culminated in an interesting development. One day the words of a new song, set to a catchy air, were circulated throughout the camp. Within a very short time the tune was being hummed, whistled, and sung throughout the community; it caught on like magic. A little later the words struck the popular fancy, the swinging chorus being a particular favourite. Indeed, its popularity became so great that it was bawled and roared forth on every occasion. It only wanted one man to start it; the words were taken up instantly by everyone within earshot, to penetrate the whole camp within a few seconds. We dubbed this the "National Anthem of Ruhleben," and I don't think it will ever be forgotten.



by any one of the prisoners, no matter how long he may live. The general impression prevailed that the song was a local creation, but afterwards I discovered that the music belonged to a popular music-hall ditty at home, which somehow or other had made its way to Ruhleben. Then, one of the boys, considering the original words capable of improvement to meet the local situation, had promptly set to work and the following was his result :—

### THE NATIONAL ANTHEM OF RUHLEBEN.

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Oh ! we're roused up in the morning,  
When the day is gently dawning,  
And we're put to bed before the night's begun ;  
And for weeks and weeks on end,  
We have never seen a friend,  
And we've lost the job our energy has won.  
Yes ! we've waited in the frost  
For a parcel that got lost,  
Or a letter that the postmen never bring.  
And it isn't beer and skittles,  
Doing work on scanty victuals,  
Yet every man can still get up and sing—

#### *Refrain—*

Line up, boys, and sing the chorus ;  
Shout the chorus all you can ;  
We want the people there,  
To hear in Leicester Square,  
That we're the boys who never get down-hearted.  
Back, back, back, again in England,  
Then we'll fill a flowing cup,  
And tell 'em clear and loud, of the Ruhleben crowd,  
That always kept their pecker up !

The technique may be criticised, but the sentiment was there, and it hit off the irrepressible Britisher to a "T."

Although our existence at Ruhleben seemed absolutely aimless, and we certainly experienced great difficulties in whiling away the tedious hour, a certain degree of diversion was contributed from outside. Just across the Spree were the testing grounds of Spandau. The hours of daylight and darkness were punctuated freely by the booming of heavy cannon undergoing their exhaustive trials before dispatch to the battle-line, while above the sonorous diapason of these instruments of death and destruction rose the shriller and nerve-racking rat-a-tat-tat of the machine guns.

The chorus of Mars was swelled by the crash, thump, and clatter of the heavily laden ammunition trains which dashed ceaselessly to and from the fighting line along the railway within a stone's throw of the camp, and this thunder seriously disturbed our rest at night, until we became so familiar therewith as to ignore it. Unrehearsed pyrotechnic displays galore were our evening treat. Star shells, brilliantly coloured lights, and scintillating magnesium flares, also under test, rose from the cluster of drab buildings and gaunt chimneys of Spandau, lighting the vicinity with the brilliance of noonday. At times, when work at the mills of death was particularly brisk, these last-named manifestations of activity assumed the proportions of an elaborate "Brock's benefit." Although we were far removed from the fighting line, we were able, from what we saw and heard of the preparations in progress at Spandau, to form a very vivid impression of what life must have been in the arena upon the Western Front, where the nations were engaged in a deathly grapple.

During the day Zeppelins majestically sailed over our heads, and we followed their movements with a quaint fascination and vigorous discussion of the precise *role* they were playing in the war. Taubes, albatrosses, and aeroplanes of numerous other types also wheeled, doubled, spiralled and vol-planed above us. We watched these

war machines of the air in silence until one day one of the Taubes, proving refractory, came crashing to earth. We wondered what the unfortunate aviator could have thought of our pean of triumph ringing in his ears as he plunged to his doom. But we could not repress exultation at the thought that our comrades in the battle-line would be troubled by one or two fewer enemy fighting men of the air.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH.

THE apathy of the German authorities in all matters concerning our welfare—except the meagre meals—never struck us so forcibly as on Sundays. While there were not many saints among us in the internment camp, we certainly were not all sinners, and we sorely missed the ministrations of spiritual pabulum upon the Accepted Day. All days of the week came alike to us, and this unvarying monotony soon began to pall and affect our nerves as well as our spirits.

One evening, about half-a-dozen of the more enterprising members of the camp, braving the biting wind, gathered in solemn conclave in the dark and forbidding shadows of the Grand Stand. The topic of discussion was how to establish some form of Divine worship. One young fellow was particularly keen upon the project, maintaining that by this means we should be able to shake off our periodical fits of depression. By this time the camp had become sorely dejected. Freedom seemed so remote. Long faces and mouths drooping at the corners were exercising a jarring wet-blanketting effect upon even the few Mark Tapleys among us.

The proposal was accepted with avidity. There and then the movement was started with the singing of a hymn ; nothing more or less. Some of us were doubtful as to the precise effect which such action would exercise, because



we were beginning to think that even the Almighty had abandoned us. But we were pleasantly surprised. Fellow prisoners, ambling and lounging around, listened intently, many humming the tune to themselves.

The next service was more enthusiastically attended, and the simple gathering to voice a hymn became a trifle elaborated by the inclusion of a short prayer. Within a week or two this was extended into a service of a couple of hymns, two or three short prayers, and a brief sermon. Those who had launched and were piloting the enterprise were more than gratified with the results achieved. Each successive service attracted a larger congregation, and one could not help observing the fervour with which those who attended sang and how intently they listened. The congregation was drawn from all social ranks in the camp ; horny-handed weather-battered sailors rubbed shoulders with men who had been dragged from flourishing businesses ; the wilder spirits, whose cursing and invective against our pitiable conditions caused one's blood to run cold, were attracted by the soothing and comforting influence of even a rudely extemporised and brief religious dissertation.

Indeed, I doubt whether the Church ever was planted in more unpromising if not forbidding ground than that offered at Ruhleben camp in those days. The initial service was one of the strangest I have ever attended. The wind swept the Grand Stand from end to end, causing teeth to chatter, half-starved frames to shiver as if with the ague, and feet to be numbed into nothingness. For the early services we were compelled to gather in the darkness, and the tunes were led by a singer whose voice certainly would have reflected credit upon any cathedral choir. Owing to the inky blackness of the night we could not see one another ; we had to depend upon our aural faculties entirely. Yet there was something decidedly cheering, comforting and soothing about those unconventional meetings which cannot be described. The congregation,



for the most part, at first attended the services smoking vigorously, but as time went on they gradually refrained from soliciting the solace offered by My Lady Nicotine at such gatherings, evidently realising that the occasion was one during which their friend might be side-tracked for a time.

When we first set the enterprise going one and all feared that the existence of a Church would be extremely brief. So many schemes, many of brilliant promise, were launched in rapid succession, but none had more than a very fleeting vogue. Directly a new project lost its touch of novelty it went into the ditch. The Church was the one exception to the rule. It grew and thrived amazingly. Before it had been going for many weeks, even upon the uninviting Grand Stand, we were able to secure the friendly glimmer of a little oil lamp, while a harmonium came into the camp from some source or other, essentially for this sacred duty.

Upon realising that the Church had come to stay, I wrote to my vicar at home asking if he would be so good as to send us some hymn-books, Bibles, and prayer-books, because we were in sore need of them. Church work was being prosecuted under a heavy disadvantage. The hymns had to be written out by hand upon sheets of paper for distribution, and such preparation was not only tedious but difficult under the adverse conditions prevailing. Still the work was equitably apportioned and willingly performed by the enthusiasts. Even the penning of hymns upon odds and ends of paper afforded useful employment for otherwise idle minds. The prayers for the most part were extemporised, and this constituted another shortcoming, because memory proved a fickle reed upon which to lean. I subsequently learned that my appeal to home influence was not permitted to pass unheeded. Unfortunately, the contributions which would have been so warmly welcomed, failed to reach us, but greater success

attended subsequent efforts. In response to my request my wife sent us one hundred and fifty Testaments, which were distributed among the "darkies." Contributions from various sources came to hand and the Church made rapid strides.

The duties of Shepherd to the flock at Ruhleben were fulfilled so far as the Church of England was concerned—this was the first sect to essay the enterprise—by one of our members. He was not ordained, but he proved a capable leader, was an excellent organiser, indefatigable, a fluent speaker and generally popular. Among the prisoners was a young fellow who was under training for a missionary and he also extended invaluable assistance.

As the gatherings grew in popularity and began to be regarded as inseparable from Ruhleben life—the Services were held regularly every Sunday afternoon at three o'clock—we decided to make a move from the uninviting pitch on the Grand Stand to a more congenial centre. A large room under the Grand Stand had been rented to serve as a theatre and a concert hall, and we arranged to hold our services here. Music was furnished from a piano, which we hired from a firm in Berlin, while we also trained and maintained an excellent male choir. Once we had secured permanent comfortable quarters we succeeded in attracting even greater numbers of our fellow prisoners, the result being that within a short space of time, Sunday Service became one of the indispensable features of camp life. We received a complete array of hymn-books, prayer-books, Bibles, and other incidentals, so that ere the winter had passed we were as completely equipped, at least with all that was needful, as any Church at home.

Our choral singing speedily became the topic of conversation and admiration in the camp, not only among the prisoners themselves, but among the German military officials as well. Many of our comrades possessed fine voices, and under careful and unremitting training by one or two of

our number, who had achieved a measure of celebrity in the musical world, solo, part, and choral singing attained an established reputation. It was somewhat curious to observe the crowded congregation within following and participating in the Service with great gusto, while outside another, and equally impressive gathering, composed of our military guard and officers, was assembled to listen to the music.

It certainly was a thrilling experience to hear 500 or 600 men singing for all they were worth. The favourite hymns were "Abide with me," "At even ere the sun was set," and another, the final line of which runs, "Give Peace, O Lord! Give Peace again!"\* which words were roared forth for all the singers knew how. Occasionally "Onward, Christian Soldiers" figured in the list, but we refrained from presenting it too often, because the swinging tune was rendered so lustily and vehemently that we feared the authorities might take umbrage, intervene, and ban it, under the misapprehension that we were possibly giving expression to some national martial song, or hurling defiance at our enemies.

When those of the Church of England faith had demonstrated conclusively that it was possible to establish a church firmly in the camp other sects followed suit. The Roman Catholic Church, highly appreciative of what we had accomplished, became friendly rivals, through the initiative of a priest who happened to be numbered among us. He secured a tiny room under the Grand Stand which, by some means or other, he completely transformed. He built an altar, and introduced many of the ritual decorations characteristic of Roman Catholicism, and aroused such widespread feelings of appreciation as to culminate in his being presented with a magnificent image of the Virgin. One fact is worthy of mention, since it is probably without parallel

\*Hymn 376, A. & M.



RUHLEBEN CHORISTERS, WHO WOULD HAVE DONE CREDIT TO ANY CATHEDRAL CHOIR.





in the records of Religion. Until the Roman Catholic priest was able to complete his especial edifice he often used to hold a service in our church, the two creeds thus moving and working hand-in-hand.

The Father of the little church established to minister to the special welfare of his exclusive flock was a wonderful enthusiast. Every festival was introduced and religiously observed. Those of the Church of England did likewise, and it may seem somewhat extraordinary, if not incongruous, to relate that we even celebrated "Harvest Thanksgiving," although possibly those at home might wonder for what we could possibly render thanks under the prevailing conditions, unless it was for the mere circumstance that we happened to be alive.

After the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church, the Jews also came into line, planting their own building and introducing their traditional service. Their task, however, was rendered somewhat easier, inasmuch as the Rabbi of Berlin frequently visited the camp, and took an active part in this work, receiving tangible assistance of a practical character from co-religionists scattered throughout Germany. But it is a remarkable circumstance, worthy of record, that within a few months, some four or five denominations had secured a solid and permanent foothold in this internment camp, were all flourishing, and were working hand-in-hand harmoniously together to lighten the load of the prisoners. It is impossible to over-rate the good work they accomplished. It was but a short and logical step from the regular Sunday service to the inauguration of prayer meetings, short week-day services, and other applications of religious work, which not only proved of incalculable benefit and imparted a high moral tone to the stranded city, but which afforded us beneficial employment, topics of conversation, fuel for reflection with a greater manifestation of cheerfulness than would otherwise have obtained.

No mention of the work accomplished by the Church of England would be complete without a tribute to the labour of the Reverend Williams. Through an unusual burst of generosity upon the part of the Teuton authorities he was graciously permitted to reside in Berlin, and to pass from camp to camp where British prisoners, both civil and military, were interned. He held an extremely difficult position, but he discharged his responsibilities in a manner which could not be criticised by those through whom he was continuing his good work on sufferance. It chafed us at times to think that he refrained from being communicative as to what was transpiring in Germany at large, but when we recalled the trying conditions under which he was discharging his self-imposed duties, and the fact that Teuton espionage was watching his every action, ready to swoop down at the slightest deviation from a path which had been delimited in fine detail, we marvelled at his tact and discretion.

He used to visit the camp once a fortnight, when he would take charge of the Service. Then the little church was crowded to suffocation, every prisoner being anxious to listen to what he had to say. His sermons were homely, totally free from cant, and appreciated from their chatty nature. He sedulously refrained from commenting upon our situation, his sole idea being to cheer us up. He would drop little tit-bits of information concerning the welfare of our compatriots in other camps, narrate how they were passing their time, convey to us their good wishes, and strongly urge us to "keep our pecker up." At such visits we were disposed to crowd around him, hungering as we were for news, but of this he could tell us little. He ventured not a word concerning the military situation, the achievements of the belligerents, or the economic state of affairs in Germany; his conversation was strictly confined to our situation, although he never omitted to voice his sympathy with us.

No member of the cloth ever toiled harder than he, or discharged his trying responsibilities more efficiently. His absorbing labour in Berlin was to look after the wives and families of the prisoners, and while he carefully refrained from serving as a courier between the separated, he was able to extend the assurance that all was well without giving the slightest offence to the authorities. It was mainly through him that we learned how the prisoners in the other camps were faring. Once or twice, when the necessity arose, we made collections to provide our less fortunate compatriots languishing elsewhere with certain comforts; while, on one occasion, he brought us a sum of money which had been raised on our behalf among the prisoners at Doberitz camp. Many exchanges of courtesies were effected through his untiring energies, and it is safe to assert that no man was so popular or held in such high esteem among the prisoners, irrespective of religious convictions.

Without being irreverent I may say there was a touch of pathetic, even tragic humour, in connection with our Services. The members of the congregation mustered with their food basins and hunks of bread. Suddenly above the singing came the tramp of feet, muffled at first, but rapidly growing louder. A barrack was marching to the kitchen for its evening dole. As the procession swung by every member took a hurried glance over his shoulder to identify the party. When a man recognised his barrack he hastily grabbed his bowl and bread, darted out of the building, and fell into the rear of the procession. Possibly some devout worshippers at home may entertain feelings of horror that a man should have placed creature before spiritual comfort. But it must be borne in mind that we were receiving barely sufficient to keep body and soul together; missing a meal meant going hungry for hours, and we were so penalised that even the denial of a single meal involved physical hardships. The men did not

scramble hurriedly from the House of God from their own choice or inclination, but in obedience to the first law of Nature, coupled with the unbending steel rules of Prussian organisation.

On one occasion, when one of our party succumbed to a malady, we hoped that we might be privileged to extend him the final religious ceremony observed at home. But this was denied. All that the authorities would permit—in fact commanded—was filing past the hearse containing the coffin, which we mutely saluted. The Burial Service was held elsewhere, ten prisoners from Ruhleben being permitted to follow our late comrade to his final resting place. I made a determined effort to be included in this party but was unceremoniously refused. Evidently the authorities had gained an inkling that I was keeping my eyes and ears open for whatever transpired, because they conveyed to me, in unmistakable language, their determination to exclude from the ceremonial any “chiel takin’ notes,” and so I had to return to my barrack to nurse my disappointment.



## CHAPTER V.

### THE MEDICAL ADMINISTRATION.

OWING to our close confinement, lack of adequate exercising facilities, the unsanitary condition of our quarters, the utter absence of the rudiments of hygiene, and the monotony and insufficiency of our food, it is a matter of extreme surprise that we were not ravaged by an epidemic. Had disease in a virulent form secured even the slightest foothold, it would have run through the community, decimating our ranks, as a fire rushes through a forest leaving devastation in its wake.

The medical arrangements provided at Ruhleben to minister to 4,000 men would not have done credit to a colony planted in a cesspool. Germany may have accomplished wonders in the science of therapeutics, and may have produced a host of clever disciples of Aesculapius, but both the men and methods were sadly missing from this camp. The first doctor to be officially appointed to the camp undoubtedly did evince a humanitarian interest in his charges, but to our minds this could scarcely be said of his successor, Dr. Geiger.

He was a stern advocate of the Prussian steel-bound system. He would visit nobody. His surgery was attached to the Kommandantur's office, and if anyone needed medical attention, no matter if one were prostrated, it was imperative to visit him. He would not depart from this inflexible rule under any circumstances whatever. And

what was more to the point, the sick and suffering had to present themselves, by hook or by crook, at his office during the prescribed hours, or languish in their torture.

He received one shattering shock which revealed his disposition and nature in its stark nakedness. A terrifying skin disorder broke out to attack one and all indiscriminately. It was not only an unsightly eruption, but was extremely painful. The face and other exposed portions of the body were ravaged. Ugly inflamed sores swelled up, some of the prisoners being horribly disfigured. To make matters worse the camp suffered from a plague of mosquitoes during the torrid season when the malady was at its height. These insects, which were of the exquisite pugnacious variety, rendered life almost intolerable. To them the peculiar rash appeared to be as attractive as the fly to the trout. The camp at the time was in a filthy condition. Refuse—animal, human and vegetable—abounded, and was exposed to these unwelcome visitors, who attacked the garbage and ourselves in turn.

The sudden appearance of this skin eruption and the virulence with which it raged and spread, gave every man-jack of us a terrible fright. We dreaded it as the precursor of the one thing which we had been apprehending—an epidemic. It must be recalled that the conditions were highly favourable to its development. We were penned up like cattle with little space in which to exercise, the racecourse at this time being successfully shut off from us by means of barbed wire fencing. Our sleeping quarters had deteriorated into little more than stys, despite the so-called improvements which had been carried out, mainly as a result of our continuous protest and at the instigation of the American Embassy, where we lodged our complaints. We had no soap, except what we purchased at our own expense, the result being that those who were without money, and they were many, had to

dispense with this commodity. They were likewise without towels, and those who were so fortunate as to possess such an article had to watch and guard it unremittingly to prevent its disappearance or universal use. How these prisoners contrived to keep themselves clean was more than we could understand.

For some three months after our arrival we were also denied the luxury of a bath. One or two of the bolder and more hardened spirits, in their resolve to preserve cleanliness and health at all hazards, resorted to the harsh alternative. They stripped, stood in the passage-way and submitted to buckets of ice-cold water, drawn from the taps, being thrown over them. In the depth of winter, with the mercury in the thermometer striving desperately to withdraw from sight into its bulb, such a douche, with the Arctic wind whistling ferociously, demanded no little pluck. The shock to the system made even the strongest among us quiver.

When this skin rash had secured a strong hold we considered it time to seek medical assistance. Forthwith we besieged the surgery. But the estimable doctor appeared to be at his wits' end to diagnose it and to treat it effectively. In his opinion there appeared to be only one potential remedy—Aspirin. As a matter of fact this drug seemed to constitute the Alpha and Omega of his knowledge of the pharmacopœia. He enlisted the assistance of Aspirin for all the ills to which flesh is heir. I have been at the surgery and have seen a man tightly gripped by fever come in tottering. A tablet of Aspirin was all he received. Another comrade came along suffering from acute diarrhœa and sickness. Aspirin was dealt out. A third limped in with a sprained foot or wrist. He, too, was treated with Aspirin. At home we laugh at the widely advertised proprietary medicines which are blazoned as a cure for all ills, but British faith in these articles is as nothing compared with the Germans' deep-rooted belief in the curative



properties of the coal tar derivative. The Aspirin treatment, which became the joke of Ruhleben, was by no means peculiar to this camp. In each of the four prisons of which I made an intimate acquaintance, Aspirin appeared to be the sovereign remedy.

Under such circumstances it is not surprising that we came to regard the qualifications of the doctor for his responsible post with considerable misgiving, if not distrust. We hesitated to entrust ourselves to the Aspirin quack. What measure of relief we received came from an unexpected quarter. Among the prisoners was a certain Britisher, J——, who, if he had not qualified, must have studied medicine very earnestly. When we discovered his ability to minister to our physical disorders we unreservedly placed ourselves in his hands and trusted him implicitly.

This sympathetic, and I must confess, accomplished comrade, was untiring in his patience and zeal, although he had to pursue his practice in a clandestine manner. The prisoners flocked to him, or he visited them if they were too ill. The task was one of extreme delicacy, since he had to carry out his humane work without raising the slightest suspicion. It was only the cases which he considered too serious for secret treatment which were referred to the official doctor. But a man had to be downright prostrated with a dangerous malady before he would consent to trust himself to anyone but J——. The result was that our compatriot found himself in constant demand at all hours of the day and night, but when he received an appeal, he never hesitated to render whatever measure of relief was within his power.

Evidently our official medical representative got wind of what was taking place and his professional jealousy was instantly aroused. But he was not sufficiently courageous to expose J——, or perhaps he was not quite certain in his deductions. Undoubtedly he concluded that his position was being undermined, because his rival had built



up a marvellously successful practice pursued without any pecuniary reward. Had our official doctor denounced our compatriot he would only have brought ridicule upon his head, because the authorities studiously refrained from interfering with us as much as possible. The less work they were occasioned upon behalf of the prisoners the better from their point of view. They would never seek trouble nor stir up a bone of contention, so that the official, had he lodged his wail, would doubtless have aroused very little enthusiasm among his superiors.

For a time we were sorely puzzled by an attack of diarrhoea which ravaged the camp at regularly recurring intervals. The first two or three outbreaks did not arouse more than passing notice, although the misery precipitated was harrowing, especially in the depths of winter.

A little later we observed that this outbreak always occurred after we had partaken of the midday meal on Sunday, and the regularity of its recurrence aroused our suspicions. As a matter of fact, "Steer clear of the Sunday soup" became the by-word of the camp, and when subsequently we were able to feast upon the food we were receiving from home, we did not fail to observe that only those who were compelled to rely upon the soup for their Sunday repast suffered. We undertook discreet enquiries and traced the cause to the kitchen, and then, from further investigations we conducted at this point, we were forced to come to the conclusion that our estimable doctor was utilising our Sunday dinner as a vehicle for the administration of a powerful aperient throughout the camp, to keep one and all in condition. Sunday was doubtless selected for this practice from the circumstance that we accepted it as a day of rest! The disgust which this discovery aroused was intense and we mutually resolved to keep out of his hands more than ever, so that he really defeated his own ends.

Yet, after all was said and done, we could not refrain from regarding an interview with the official doctor with amusement. When a patient presented himself at the surgery he was curtly requested to narrate the symptoms of his disorder. Meantime the doctor would regard him narrowly out of his wolfish suspicious eyes. When the sufferer had finished the doctor would blurt out with a kind of shriek :

“ Malingerer ! ”

This was one of the few words of English which he knew, and he used to take a fiendish delight in expressing it with the rat-a-tat-tat of a machine gun, dwelling fully upon each syllable.

He would never believe a prisoner. To him we were always shamming. But his preference for the foregoing word ended in tragedy. A prisoner was suffering from an advanced heart complaint, and one day, feeling particularly seedy, he presented himself to the doctor. When the patient had concluded his case, out came the inevitable word. The man, stung to the quick by the false accusation, became excited, and flew into a fearful rage, which, however, only served to convince the medical representative of the correctness of his deductions. The patient stamped off to his barrack in high dudgeon. A few hours later he was found dead: he had succumbed to his affliction.

On another occasion one of our number fell ill, and even our unpractised eyes could see that he was being tortured by a raging fever. One or two of us went down to the surgery to report and we urged the doctor, for all we knew how, to visit the sufferer. But he would not hear of it. His surgery was provided for receiving patients, and unless they presented themselves there they could not expect to receive the fruits of his knowledge and skill. We protested vehemently that the man was unable to walk, but to no avail. Retracing our steps we got our comrade

out of his bed, wrapped him up as warmly as we could, since the weather was bitter, and assisted him to the surgery. But that journey nearly proved his undoing. Upon his return he was prostrated. He rapidly grew worse, and it was only through our unremitting attention that he pulled round. Throughout the whole of his severe illness the medical attendant never exhibited the slightest trace of interest or humane feeling in this man.

One young British jockey went under merely because the doctor resolutely refused to devote him the attention of which we thought he was in dire need. The death of this young fellow forced a wave of deep indignation throughout the camp, the opinion of one and all being that he might still have been alive had he been skilfully treated. The authorities strove desperately to assuage the outburst of popular feeling, but to no effect. To this day the prisoners emphatically declare that the young jockey was a victim of Prussian system in its most oppressive and brutal form, which, in plain English, may be declared as nothing short of gross neglect and absolute indifference as to whether he recovered or not.

Our official medical attendant sometimes displayed symptoms of initiative and enterprise which created widespread amusement. One of these remarkable brain waves struck him one morning during the prevalence of the skin disease. The rapid increase in the number of patients evidently alarmed him. After he had surveyed a score or so of us he jumped excitedly to his feet, prancing like a two-year-old, and rubbing his hands gleefully at his brilliant inspiration. We surveyed him wonderingly. Turning to us he ejaculated:

"I know what is the matter with you. You are too lazy. You don't bestir yourselves. You want exercise. Do you understand? Exercise! Exercise!! Exercise!!! And you are going to get it!"

Seeing that we had been fretting for weeks for the



opportunity to give our legs a good stretch we failed to see any novelty in his prescription. Confinement, as we all knew very well, had been mainly responsible for the scourge which had visited us. No one can conceive the wistfulness with which we used to look through the chinks of the gate upon the broad expanse of trotting and racing track from which we were shut off. We would have given anything to have taken a sharp walk or sprint round its circuit. Now we were to have our ardent desire gratified as part and parcel of our medical treatment.

The doctor was so jubilant over his sudden discovery of the cause of our complaint as to be impatient. He set the cumbrous Prussian machinery moving without loss of time. We were paraded, and the whole 4,000 men were ushered through the gate for a brisk walk round the track, under a strong guard needless to say. But this very exercise revealed the incompetence of our medical guardian in a very telling manner. We were of all ages and pedestrian abilities. Some were sick and others were in full health. But that was immaterial. We were all commanded to walk at the same gait, and the guards set the pace. Those of our number who were young and healthy experienced no difficulty in maintaining the official military stride, and were able to keep it up for the prescribed quarter of an hour without the slightest difficulty. But those who had passed the prime of life, who were stiff and rusty about the joints and wind, as well as those who were lame and halt, could not manage more than a moderate gait, and then could keep it up for only brief intervals.

Consequently the exercise developed into nothing but a farcical episode, which we enjoyed hugely. The older men, as well as those in indifferent health, dropped out one after another. The procession, which started out so bravely and with the bearing and compactness of a battalion of fighting men, became accentuated into a long drawn out straggling and motley string. It was impossible to slow



down the pace to that of the slowest man, since then the younger and more agile members of the party failed to keep themselves warm, the outcome being that all possible benefits arising from the exercise were lost.

Dr. Geiger at last grasped this circumstance, and, there-upon, doubtless at the urging of the officers, who understood the matter far better than he did, the 4,000 men were divided into two companies—the first composed of the brisker-walking, staying members, and the second of pedestrians who could only muster a moderate pace. But even then the scheme proved inoperative; the result was no better than when we were mustered together. The only obvious solution was to divide the 4,000 men into a number of parties, each of common walking ability. But this scheme was too complicated for the military. The doctor's enthusiasm underwent a heavy damping, probably at the hands of his superiors. Within a few days the exercise deteriorated into a go-as-you-please, as-long-as-you-please, when-you-please display of pedestrianism which was anything but impressive to the Prussian guards, accustomed as they were to clockwork operations. Within a month the daily exercise was voted to be a dismal failure, and was accordingly abandoned, much, however, to our disappointment, because, although we possibly failed to satisfy Teuton military ideals, we enjoyed the walk very keenly. But this flash in the pan was characteristic of German methods. Few proposals, suddenly conceived upon our behalf and enthusiastically ushered in, failed to prove more than the proverbial nine days' wonder.

Within easy distance of Ruhleben, and forming part and parcel of the medical administration, though independently controlled, was the sanatorium, to which certain cases, after prolonged diagnosis, were transferred from the camp. Prisoners who were compelled to accept its treatment had to defray their own expenses while sojourning in this establishment. Needless to say we were mulcted up to the

hilt for this contribution to the maintenance of our health. While some of the prisoners certainly declared that little fault could be found with this home—under the circumstances, and they were careful to explain this qualification—others condemned it unequivocally. I had made up my mind to keep out of it at all hazards, and succeeded, so I cannot say anything based upon personal experience concerning the treatment which was meted out to sufferers, but the universal growl was against the expense of the treatment within its walls.\*

There was one subsidiary establishment which was regarded askance by every man in the camp. This was the lazaret. Male orderlies attended to the patients, while a prisoner was appointed to serve as general attendant. Many dark stories concerning this hospital were circulated throughout the camp, and it certainly carried a far from savoury reputation.

While some of these stories were unmistakably exaggerated, others were founded on solid fact. I can testify to the latter from personal investigations. I learned that on one occasion the establishment ran out of surgical dressings; had nothing with which to tend injured prisoners. But they surmounted the difficulty, from what I discovered, by using discarded dressings.

This utilisation of second-hand dressings, some of which should never have escaped the fire, provoked a feeling of horror and dread. But there was no alternative. Every dressing upon which hands could be placed had been requisitioned for military service, a severe shortage of these facilities having been experienced.

On another occasion a young prisoner admitted into the hospital suddenly collapsed. He was examined and life was pronounced to be extinct. Although it was not an expert investigation, it was accepted, and the supposed corpse

\* The charges ranged from 7s. to 12s. per day.—H.C.M.

was immediately taken out and laid in a bath which happened to be handy. The cold night air exercised a resurrecting effect, because the corpse came round to give expression to dismal groans and moans. The young fellow, unable to extricate himself from the bath, crouched upon his freezing couch all night, at the mercy of the inclement weather. He was found in the morning, half-dead with the cold, and was hurriedly taken into the hospital. Desperate efforts to save him were made, but they proved abortive. He lingered for a few days and then succumbed, ostensibly from the malady from which he was suffering; but whatever part his affliction may have played in his demise it is only too apparent that it was very materially accelerated by exposure during that fearfully cold night!

When a man died his body was transferred secretly to its last resting place; we never knew what became of it. The only information vouchsafed to those of our number who were inquisitive was that he had been sent away. Within a short time, owing to the truth leaking out, although somewhat circuitously, we began to attach an awful significance to the two words, "sent away," and none of the prisoners hesitated to use every artifice to keep out of the lazaret, preferring to take his chance among his comrades, who were far more solicitous over his continued presence in our midst.

As the weeks dragged wearily by, the camp being all sixes and sevens, many radical alterations were effected. But every improvement was entirely due to the initiative and work of the inmates themselves. The German authorities did not care two straws whether we were alive or dead. German arms were apparently triumphant, so what did it matter whether the prisoners suffered abuse, short commons, or were ignored almost entirely! If a man went under the authorities did not trouble their heads two seconds over the incident. They merely regarded it from the aspect



of having one prisoner less to watch and feed. It was simply the undaunted spirit of the Britisher which kept the camp going. The authorities themselves provided us with nothing beyond what was absolutely imperative—food to keep us alive, and that sparingly, as well as quarters, which were deplorable, in which to sleep. Complaints were always received with a smirk and a promise of redress merely to keep us quiet. It was only the incessant hammering by the American Ambassador which brought about any improvement in our conditions, and, to his credit be it said, he always listened patiently to our wailings. If they were well-founded he lost no time in causing the Germans to sit up and to take notice, and never left the matter until his recommendations had been carried into effect.

During the early days one of the iniquities of the camp was what can only be described, for want of a more appropriate term, as the isolation or quarantine camp. It was separated from us as completely as the American continent is isolated from Europe by the broad Atlantic. I discovered its existence quite by accident. I was trudging aimlessly through the camp one day when I caught a glimpse of my friend, Moresby White, and another prisoner who had been with me at Sennelager, and who had passed through the frightful tragedy of "The Bloody Night of September 11th." I hailed him, but, at that moment, the two disappeared into a barrack.

Returning to my own quarters I communicated my discovery to my three colleagues, to whom the twain were also known, since they had likewise made his acquaintance while incarcerated in Sennelager. They were incredulous, and chaffed me mercilessly over my imagination, but I was not to be disputed. To prove that I had not been suffering from hallucination I hastened off to discover my friend, but although I hunted high and low and made exhaustive enquiry at the barrack into which I had seen him vanish, I failed to track him. In fact, his name was quite



unknown. I began to wonder whether after all I had not been the victim of my own imagination.

The days passed without any success attending my persistent enquiries, and I was just giving up all hope of laying my friend by the heels when we suddenly came face to face. My first enquiry was as to the barrack in which he was living.

"Barrack!" he replied, "I'm not in a barrack. I'm in the isolation camp!"

"Isolation camp?" I repeated in surprise.

"Sure! That place over there!" and he raised his arm to indicate its situation.

"What's it like?"

"Like! Phew! I guess it's the limit! It's just running alive!" And the disgust with which he expressed his opinion was more impressive than the words themselves.

He was living, with his companion, in strange company indeed. He shuddered as he related the condition of his companions and how the whole place was reeking with vermin. From this I gathered he was experiencing a rough time. But he was not disposed to be communicative. Like me, he had become inured to hardship under Prussian authority, and was content to let his opinion go at the foregoing picturesque explanation, feeling confident that I would understand, as indeed I did. Some days later he was transferred to the main camp.

From the eloquent descriptions vouchsafed by other prisoners who had made acquaintance with the isolation establishment, it must have been a terrible hole. But its reign was brief. Even some of the inmates who were not unfamiliar with vermin, raised a protest at the plague of parasites residing there. Their objections were expressed in words which were more violent than polite, and the mutterings were not lost upon the authorities. These unsavoury quarters were abolished and dismantled, our

warders manifesting a keen desire to obliterate and to forget all about them the moment their noisome reputation became common property in the camp.

The circumstance that Ruhleben has never been ravaged by contagion offers a high tribute to the British prisoners themselves, and is not due, in the slightest degree, to German effort. The prisoners speedily appreciated the necessity to observe all rules of hygiene to preserve their health unimpaired, and did not hesitate to introduce measures of precaution as far as became possible within their limited powers. The authorities merely looked on. When the camp began to assume ship-shape and to crystallise into a well-ordered, perfectly organised and law-abiding community, and when schemes for effecting improvements were matured, all dangers of an epidemic passed away.

## CHAPTER VI.

### SANITATION AND HYGIENE.

THE German nation, in the wisdom of its conceit, would have the world believe that it is unassailable in all that pertains to the science of sanitation and hygiene. But the camp at Ruhleben gave the lie direct to this arrogant assertion; the arrangements in this connection would not have done credit to a South Sea Island cannibal community.

At the date I arrived at Ruhleben the conditions were ghastly. The authorities had not even introduced the rudiments of a sanitation system; everything was of the very crudest description.

Although we numbered a round 4,000 souls, there was only sufficient latrine accommodation for a few men, and even this was of the most crazy description.

A huge pit had been dug and had been lined with concrete to receive human excreta. Thrice a week a crazy vehicle rumbled into the camp to empty this cesspool, the contents being transferred to the tank which the vehicle carried by means of a hand-pump. To facilitate the operation, the contents of the pit were first stirred vigorously to render the matter fairly fluid. No disinfectants of any description were employed, while the bubbling mass, the rendezvous of swarms of flies and mosquitoes in summer, emitted such a revolting stench when agitated, as to drive every man to his barrack. During the hot season, when the

emptying process was in progress, life within the camp was well-nigh intolerable.

We persistently agitated for a reform of the sanitation system, because we feared the effect of the open foul-smelling cesspool upon our health, but it was to little avail. The authorities seemed to be absolutely helpless. Then we insisted upon the provision of further accommodation, to meet the exigencies of the camp, but this appeal likewise fell upon deaf ears, until at last we succeeded in drawing the attention of the United States Ambassador to the situation. He instantly recognised the legitimacy of our complaints and ordered extensions and improvements to be carried out forthwith. While his active intervention brought about a certain amelioration of the fearful conditions, the characteristic primitiveness of everything attempted could not fail to command attention.

It was not until many months later that any efforts to grapple with the issue upon scientific lines were made. Then a flushing system was introduced, and linked up, I believe, with an existing sewage disposal scheme in operation at Spandau, since the main pipe from the camp passed under the Canal in that direction. But the lay-out of this improvement served to reveal Teuton incompetence very convincingly. The main installed was far too small in diameter to cope with the volume of work which was imposed. Consequently blocks in the pipe occurred with exasperating frequency and temporarily disorganised the whole scheme. Still, this more hygienic installation, despite its short-comings, served to ease our minds very materially. In due time we were able to shut down the original latrine altogether, and at our own expense subsequently turned it to more useful account as a semi open-air cold shower bath!

The accommodation provided in the barracks for convenience during the night was also of the most wretched



and unhealthy character. A single bucket was provided for each loft, and this was supposed to suffice for the needs of 150 men. Naturally it became filled to overflowing, the surplus spreading over the floor and cascading down the staircase leading to the "flat" in its escape. In summer the stench was unbearable, while in winter the bucket constituted a terrible death-trap. The contents would freeze into a solid chunk, while the overflow converted the treads of the staircase into steps of ice, and woe betide the unwary when he put his foot on the slide. Dexterity of no mean order was required to ascend and descend the staircase under such conditions; a little undue or incautious haste and one was brought to realise the character of the menace by a resounding thwack in the back as a result of losing one's foot-hold. More than one nasty accident occurred on the staircase from this cause, which did not tend to placate the ruffled tempers of the residents.

The authorities had not even made the slightest attempt to cope with the surface water which collected after a heavy rainstorm—and it *does* rain in Ruhleben. Some of the prisoners, whose homes were in Farther Britain, candidly admitted that in one respect the camp did remind them of home; the rain pelted down with the fury of a tropical storm. Under the pattering of 4,000 to 5,000 pairs of feet the surface of the ground, especially where the maximum of traffic was imposed, became churned into lakes of dust or mud, according to the vagaries of the weather. Roads were conspicuous by their absence. As the surface was wildly uneven, and the rain-water could not get away quickly by soakage, it wandered here, there, and everywhere, forming straggling and uninviting lagoons. We did not object to these accumulations of water only in the sense that they compelled us to become amphibious while they lasted. We had to wade, sometimes ankle deep, through the filthy slime, to get our meals from the kitchen!

No effort whatever was made by the authorities to remedy this terrible state of affairs. One barrack, fringing the depression in which the rain-water took a fiendish delight to collect, suffered somewhat severely. When the water was giving signs of rising the inmates had an exciting time. A miniature barrage of boards and other accessible materials was run up at the entrance to keep the water out. This was the only means whereby flooding could be averted. But even then the water, from prolonged lapping the walls, forced an entry by percolating the interstices, the result being that the interior was thoroughly damp. How the inmates of this barrack ever succeeded in warding off illness was more than we could understand.

Things came to such a pass as to demand drastic action upon our own part. Whenever we complained to the authorities they merely met our protests with a non-committal shrug of the shoulders, a shake of the head and eye-brow dancing. Consequently we decided to work out our own salvation. We laid our heads together and discovered that our ranks included one or two civil engineers as well as many others who were familiar with road-making tools. The former prepared the designs and the latter, organised into businesslike gangs, carried them into effect. An excellent road was driven right through the camp, ensuring us a dry causeway, no matter what the weather was like, so that we could move between the barracks and the kitchen in comfort and with dry feet. The cost of building this road was defrayed by ourselves, the men who carried out the actual work being paid a weekly wage from a Special Fund. This road was so well built as to arouse the keen enthusiasm and admiration of the authorities. After it was completed they had the impudence to approach the designers and working gangs to ask if they would consent to build roads for the Germans outside the camp? Needless to say this cool request met with a very blunt and emphatic refusal.

The road was given an excessive camber, and its surface was tightly compressed so as to allow the water to make a quick and easy escape to either side, where it formed stagnant uninviting lakes. The latter, however, constituted a certain source of amusement. The sailors would gather round, fashion crude miniature boats with paper sails, and indulge in model boat racing, pursuing the recreation with all the delight of school-boys. It was the only way in which they could kill time.

When we entered into occupation of the barracks, lighting, both natural and artificial, was at a serious discount. So far as the lofts were concerned a condition of twilight prevailed throughout the day, the rays of the sun only penetrating the everlasting gloom fitfully through the small begrimed windows. In those days artificial lighting was absolutely unknown. We either had to go to bed with the birds, which was about five o'clock in winter, or spend the evening conversing in the darkness. Nine o'clock was the official hour for extinguishing all lights, but seeing that they were existent only in the abstract, the call "lights out" and the final coast round by the guard to see that the regulation was obeyed, seemed somewhat superfluous, and incidentally created considerable, though enforced hilarity.

The dreariness of the evening hours grated upon our nerves, so one or two of the more dare-devil spirits decided to run the risk of courting trouble by infringing the rules. A few candles were procured, the faint soft light shed by which sufficed to invest the forbidding lofts with a little comfort. By summarily taking the solution of this problem into our own hands we incurred serious penalties, the authorities doubtless dreading an outbreak of fire, but to our surprise no pother arose. As a matter of fact, it appeared as if the utilisation of candles gave birth to a brilliant, if belated, inspiration. Electric lighting was

installed, at the direct instigation of the American Ambassador I believe, and this was a decided improvement since it enabled us to indulge in evening occupations and recreations within the sanctuary of our residence. One lamp, in the centre of the loft, was graciously permitted to remain alight all night, a concession which we greatly appreciated, because if we could not sleep we could while away the night by reading or writing.

But the most intense discomfort we experienced was the bitter cold. We were virtually lying upon the bare stone floor—there was scarcely an inch of straw between the hard couch and our bodies. During the winter we were nearly frozen to death. Our limbs were numbed, while we shook as if with the ague. In response to our petition the American Ambassador insisted that the barracks should be heated, and to this end a central heating system was installed somewhat tardily and ungraciously. Undoubtedly, the authorities resented this enforced contribution towards our comfort, judging from the way it was carried out, and the arbitrary method in which it was operated. A central station was erected and equipped, pipes leading therefrom to the various buildings. But when first brought into use the heat was turned on for only a brief period during the day, and the length of the interval rendered it worse than useless, because the degree of heat emitted was almost impalpable, while it was provided at the hour when we could have done without it. Subsequently the authorities appeared to become invested with a vestige of horse-sense, which enabled us to gain a certain measure of satisfaction from the development. Another distinctly beneficial improvement was when the American Ambassador demanded that our beds should be raised above the floor.

But, strange to relate, it was only those in the lofts who derived any measure of comfort from the heat. The tenants of the horse-boxes never profitted one iota because





### THE LATEST ACHIEVEMENT IN RUHLEBEN.

The boys worked long and hard to cultivate gardens to make their crude horse boxes look more homely. The windows above show the lofts, the height from floor to roof where we slept being 3 ft. 6 in.



the pipes were placed outside ! The unfortunate occupants were also driven nearly crazy by the draughts which whistled through the space between the top of a partition and the ceiling. They overcame this nuisance by pasting up brown paper, but at the same time as they overcame the ear-cutting currents of air they excluded all the heat ! This unhappy condition of affairs was never remedied. The authorities had fulfilled their part of the bargain ; they had installed the heating system as demanded by the American Ambassador, and it was up to the prisoners themselves to devise ways and means to secure the maximum of benefit therefrom.

While the ventilation of the horse-boxes was fairly complete, thanks to the draughts, that of the lofts was execrable. When we first went into residence we could secure a certain degree of ventilation by opening the small windows. But the authorities would have none of this. They not only closed the windows, but screwed them up tightly, and to make sure that they would not be opened surreptitiously they covered them on the outside with heavy wire netting. The reason for this action was never fathomed ; possibly it was done to frustrate any attempt at escape during the night. What ventilation we received came through the cracks in the walls and the holes in the roof. The former channels were resented by the inmates, since they were fiendishly draughty, and accordingly were stopped with paper. The holes in the roof had to go untouched, but they were a source of intense discomfort during wet weather when the water came dripping through, saturating the bedding, and submitting the occupant to an unappreciated shower-bath. To secure any tangible ventilation we had to leave the door ajar, but as the air came rushing into the loft through this opening with the ferocity of an Arctic blizzard we had to close and seal it up.

It must not be supposed that our captors allowed us

to lead an entirely idle life. There were certain duties which we had to perform daily, such as collecting paper littering the camp, and sweeping the purlieus of the buildings. There was a huge bin outside each barrack into which refuse and sweepings were thrown. Once a week we were given a wagon, to which the contents of the bins were transferred. Then we had to convey this garbage to the dump. No horses were provided for haulage; we had to do this ourselves. Teams of prisoners were hitched to the shafts and under guard were compelled to drag the vehicle to a big depression not far away which was being filled up. Despite the arduousness of this work, there was never a lack of volunteers to serve as hauliers; it gave us the opportunity for a little exercise and to see something beyond the four walls of our prison.

The one attribute of civilisation which we missed more than anything else was the luxury of a bath. The only make-shift, as already narrated, was to stand stark naked upon the stone floor of the passage way near the taps and submit to a douche from the hurling of a bucket of ice-cold water over one by a comrade. We fretted at the denial of facilities to keep ourselves clean, and finally caused the authorities to relent. I have already drawn attention to the isolation camp not far distant, a feature of which was a hot shower bathroom. When the isolation camp was abandoned the bathroom was maintained, and under an armed guard those who desired a bath were escorted to the building in question. Although this room was likewise extremely primitive and ramshackle we unhesitatingly accepted the limited advantages which it offered. We were compelled to disrobe, bathe, and redress in what was virtually one room. Naturally the steam arising from the hot water formed a thick impenetrable fog, which saturated our underclothing. It was useless to grumble; we had agitated for bathing facilities, and they had been provided. If one's underclothing became soddened during the process,



well, that was the owner's look-out. Consequently the last stage was worse than the first, since we had to retrace our steps to the camp with our underclothing, wringing wet, clinging to our shivering bodies.

For many months the luxury of hot water within the camp was practically unknown. We were compelled to walk to the kitchen and pester the attendants for a small basinful. If they were gracious they would oblige. When we commenced to receive parcels of provisions from home the demand for hot water increased alarmingly, since we required it to brew our tea, coffee, cocoa, or what-not in the privacy of our barracks. If a trip were made to the kitchen it was likely to prove abortive. Possibly a barrack was lined up waiting to be served, in which event one could not hope to receive attention unless one was prepared to stand at the end of the line to await one's turn. If there were no one there, then, for a halfpenny or so, one would probably be successful.

We approached the authorities with a petition for an extension of these facilities. They listened, and then suggested that we might be able to get as much as we wanted if we were furnished with a special boiler house, but the whole cost of which we should have to defray ourselves. We accepted even this concession, purchased the whole of the material for the building, as well as the boilers, and paid for the fuel which we required.

The installation of this boiler house proved an inestimable boon. We could get a bucket of boiling water for a penny and the demand was heavy. A long queue would line up outside and I have waited for an hour or more for my bucketful. The hot-water house proved a highly profitable venture, and incidentally must have been distinctly lucrative to the authorities, since it was stated they drew a commission of  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. upon all transactions.

Hot water was in request for a hundred and one purposes, but one of the most popular usages was for heating

the tins of food which we received from home. At first the practice was for one to go down to the boiler house, pay a penny for a bucket of water, and then immerse the tin for about an hour, calling for the article on the way back. But subsequently we hit upon a more economical and satisfactory method of achieving this end. A string was securely attached to each tin, together with a label bearing the owner's name. The tin was dropped into the boiler, the upper end of the string being secured. Several dozen tins would be heated in this manner at one time. When the owner came along for his tin, the attendant, selecting the attached identity label, hauled it out and away the excited owner rushed to have as hot a meal in his barrack as was possible. But sometimes the string became detached from the tin. Then was witnessed one of the most exciting fishing matches ever conceived. Probing in a big boiler for a derelict tin of food, dodging several others attached to their leashes, as well as the merrily boiling water and blinding steam, was sport indeed, not unmingled with a certain amount of voluble invective upon the part of the attendant, who considered the enterprise well worth the penny levied, and who waxed sarcastic at the fumble-fistedness of a man in tying a piece of string around the tin.

The hot water was also warmly appreciated for laundry purposes. In the early days washing of clothes was practically unknown. Many prisoners possessed nothing beyond what they stood in. Consequently the underlinen had to be worn continuously. If a prisoner so placed decided to enjoy the luxury of clean underclothing he had to wash it himself in his barrack, and then stay in his bed until it had dried! As a rule the garments presented a worse appearance after being laundered in this rough and tumble manner than they did before, since soap was a luxury and the cold water proved very intractable. Subsequently a firm in Berlin undertook to carry out all laundry work, performing collection and delivery once a week. But this

amenity only benefited the prisoners who were able to point to a well-stocked wardrobe. Those who had only one shirt, one pair of socks, vest, or what-not to their name, could not stay in bed for five or six days until the solitary garment returned. Consequently they were compelled either to stick to the shirt, refraining from washing it at all, or doing it over-night in the hope that it would be ready by the morning. When further supplies of these essential articles became available they were either worn continuously until they could be worn no longer, and then discarded in favour of a new rig-out, or else, if the owner possessed a change he followed the conventional practise of wearing one while the other was at the laundry.

So far as the internal condition of the lofts was concerned we were left to our own devices. At first we were compelled to lie upon loose straw, but this was afterwards stowed into sacks provided by the authorities, thereby forming small mattresses. To-day, straw being valuable as a food-stuff, wood-shavings are served out to fulfil this purpose. The mattress idea was warmly appreciated, inasmuch as when the straw was loose it became heavily contaminated with mud and other filth introduced upon our boots, which precipitated a lamentable state of affairs, especially when the straw was periodically livened up, and threw heavy nauseating clouds of dust into the air. When the straw had been matted we were able to keep the floor in a tolerably clean condition, although the congested disposition of the wooden beds reduced the open space to narrow gangways. These were swept regularly by orderlies who were appointed by the residents of the barracks, and for the most part were performed by necessitous members among us, who were remunerated for their work. Each man in a barrack contributed regularly a penny or more per week to the orderly fund, the financial contribution naturally varying with the monetary status of the prisoner.

But, after all, the clean bill of health borne by the civil internment camp at Ruhleben is not a matter about which the German authorities can flatter themselves. It is entirely attributable to the Britisher's traditional love of cleanliness, adaptability, and determination to see it through to the bitter end. The Germans often expressed their wonder at what we did, which was a matter of extreme satisfaction to ourselves, inasmuch as it convincingly proved that, in matters affecting questions of health and hygiene, the Teuton, as in other fields of activity, is not a pioneer, but merely a slavish copyist.



## CHAPTER VII.

### THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMUNAL GOVERNMENT WITHIN THE CAMP.

WHEN I was drafted to the central internment camp near Spandau, the community which I discovered reminded me of nothing so much as a mammoth gipsy encampment. When four thousand men are suddenly flung into one another's company, chaos and confusion are inevitable. The British community resident in, and travelling through Germany, was so stunned by the suddenness and comprehensiveness of the blow as to fail to grasp its significance or far-reaching effects. Ignorance and uncertainty as to the future were so complete as to cause the time to drag heavily. An atmosphere of utter aimlessness prevailed, while the faint-hearted, though fortunately in the numerical minority, settled down into a moping comatose state, prepared to accept anything and everything as it came, and refraining from lifting so much as a little finger on their own behalf.

All things considered, there was a perfectly legitimate excuse for such lethargy and disposition to accept the camp as it was found. The current impression prevailed that we were certain to be released within a very short time; that the authorities had rounded us up merely to keep us under surveillance while maturing a scheme whereby they would be able to keep perfect track of us with facility or to arrange for our repatriation. Many cherished the

thought that we should be given our freedom on "pass" once more, or at least be permitted to live within certain areas, where we could be watched without taxing the authorities to any pronounced degree. Naturally such a buoyant hope re-acted against any interest being evinced in our surroundings. We argued, and logically perhaps under the circumstances, that it would be a sheer waste of time and energy to embark upon any improvements, since an order consenting to our release might come to hand at any moment.

The authorities were wily; they encouraged the maintenance of the fictitious theory at the time. It was to their advantage. The Teuton is unremittingly cautious to avoid trouble. In this instance the authorities were quick to seize upon British feeling to the greatest advantage to themselves, and did not hesitate to placate us in every possible manner. They did not openly aver that we were to be released within a short time; they were too foxy for that. But at the same time they did not deny the current statement which gained credence and widespread circulation. I had already learned to my cost that the German is uncannily adept at this game. I had suffered from similar tactics while languishing in Wesel prison and Sennelager camp, and I declined to be lulled into a false sense of security. I communicated my personal impressions to my colleagues, but for the most part, they, being ignorant of the depths of German craftiness and bluff, refused to listen to me for a moment, and I was promptly declared to be a croaking raven.

A certain fretfulness and chaffing prevailed among the prisoners, but owing to the sedulous fostering of the pending release canard by the authorities, open discontent, trouble, and agitation were successfully averted. Moreover, the authorities realised that by keeping us keyed up to such a high pitch of expectancy, they were gradually wearing down our high spirits, and that complete collapse

would attend the re-action when we at last realised that we had been living in a fool's paradise. It was not until we observed one new building after another going up, thereby increasing our accommodation, that the awful truth dawned upon us. Then we saw we were condemned to stay in this accursed spot for an indefinite period. By that time our captors had got us completely under their thumb.

Once we realised the true condition of affairs we surveyed the situation from the typically British point of view—make the best of it. Transference from the military to the civil administration brought a certain measure of improvement, but the former still remained supreme. The camp was closely guarded by soldiers, although armed control within, owing to our proving law-abiding and tractable, was gradually relinquished, and at last it ceased entirely. We assumed the responsibilities for maintaining order among ourselves. Then the soldiers were delegated solely to patrolling outside the camp, sleeping quarters being provided within, but they were dispossessed of all authority over us, for which relief they seemed to be devoutly thankful.

Although our guard was never communicative concerning the fortunes of war, actions were far more eloquent than words. We could not fail to observe how hard Germany was being pushed for men. When we were first coralled strapping young soldiers swarmed everywhere, swaggering with true Prussian arrogance, flushed with the first smell of blood, and disposed to treat us with contempt. Being numerically strong, they watched us closely, and never hesitated to intervene upon the slightest breach of any of the myriad regulations by which we were bound. Evidently they considered "carpetting" a British prisoner to be a highly diverting amusement.

One thing was sternly suppressed. We were not permitted to collect in groups, no matter how harmless our



mutual discussion might be. There being nothing to do, naturally the prisoners were apt to gather in this manner to give expression to individual theories, to air speculations as to the future, or to discuss the topics of the hour. As we gathered the guard would watch us keenly, and then, when it considered the party was too big, it would advance and roughly disperse us, taking every care to send us in different directions. This unceasing watching of groups became almost intolerable at one juncture. It was at the time when the decision of Italy was trembling in the balance. Evidently the Germans, some time before Italy reached her decision, were fully aware that the Triple Alliance was doomed to a rupture. We heard all about it, and, as may be supposed, we discussed the situation very animatedly.

The authorities, impressed by our openly-declared pro-Italian sympathy, tightened up the regulations. Evidently they anticipated a manifestation of exuberant "mafficking" upon our part when the momentous decision was reached by Italy to range her forces alongside those of the Allies. Accordingly they issued a warning, that, should there be the slightest display of jubilation, we should be severely punished, both collectively and individually. They did not communicate to us any idea of the projected fate in store for us in such an event, but contented themselves with uttering dark threats and ominous hints.

However, we were not to be intimidated, although we unanimously decided that, on behalf of the camp as a whole, we would refrain from any public demonstration. We would have a junketing within our barracks after the guards had sounded "lights out." To this end there ensued a heavy run upon spaghetti. Every available ounce of this national Italian comestible was greedily acquired, and we were able to amass impressive stores with which we regaled ourselves joyously and handsomely upon the night when Italy announced her intentions. It was a



clandestine "maffick," but was all the more exuberant because we had the satisfaction of knowing that we had outwitted the authorities completely, they being in utter ignorance of our celebration.

As the weeks wore on we noticed that the guard was more frequently changed, that older and older men were successively delegated to the duty of mounting watch and ward over us, and that the numerical strength of the military wardens was consistently and rapidly undergoing marked diminution. This circumstance impressed us more than anything else, and our spirits rose. As the number of soldiers decreased the barrier which had existed between captors and captives became whittled down until it disappeared altogether. The German soldier is always very brave and energetic when he has a host of comrades within hail, but when this numerical support disappears, he becomes a craven.

Moreover, the older men regarded the situation from a different point of view. They had been torn from their homes and businesses, and were inwardly opposed to the war. They nursed no resentment against us; indeed, they were communicative, affable, and ready to perform any small duty to ingratiate themselves with us. We saw we were gaining a moral ascendancy over them, and we did not hesitate to profit from it. At the same time we were very careful not to tilt against the windmill of officialdom. We realised that the less we inconvenienced or exasperated our wardens the easier was our lot. Accordingly, when at last we decided that the moment had arrived for us to essay to take over the camp and become responsible for its internal administration, the authorities, impressed by our record of docility, and that we were a well-ordered, law-abiding community, placed no obstacles in our way. This was a distinct concession, since there were so many anomalies and shortcomings, if not actual hardships, demanding immediate redress, which we could

effect among ourselves, but which the authorities would not consider for a moment.

We decided to run the camp, so far as the limitations would permit, in accordance with British traditions, and to establish British practise and method, right in the heart of the enemy's country. A complete transformation was wrought. The guards came to the conclusion that we were not such bad fellows after all. We reciprocated the sentiment, the result being that although our wardens were changed frequently, we always maintained our superiority. It evidently became noised among the soldiers that looking after the British prisoners was a soft and lucrative job. As the economic situation within Germany grew worse, the animosity against us diminished almost to zero, the soldiers rightly concluding that they had everything to gain and nothing to lose from cultivating our friendship, although now and again an upstart, upon his arrival, would attempt to parade his arrogance and authority.

So far as the authorities were concerned they never wanted to be bothered ; it was the system, and not the individual, which had to be taken into consideration. Moreover, we were unremitting in our determination to suppress all attempts at open defiance and lawlessness among ourselves, and if we could not control one of our number, we speedily escorted him to the authorities to be dealt with according to the nature of his offence. The officers themselves expressed their approval of our methods, and when forced to intervene, did so with reluctance.

When we received permission to govern ourselves, we decided that we could not do better than to inaugurate a communal control based upon the broad practise followed by every city and town at home. The office of Mayor was occupied by the Captain of the Camp, who was recognised to be the sole intermediary between the prisoners and the authorities. All complaints had to be made through him, and his decision was final. If he

conceded that a "grouse" was well founded, he passed it on to the proper quarter. This move was appreciated by the authorities. They were preserved from petty-fogging and imaginary worries, and, within a short time, admitted that any complaint which reached them through the Camp's Captain demanded investigation, because otherwise it would never have come before them. Then each barrack elected a captain, who in turn was responsible for the good conduct, welfare, behaviour, and cleanliness of the members resident therein, and he again acted as the channel for all complaints between the prisoners in his barrack and the Captain of the Camp.

The system worked with wonderful smoothness and satisfaction to one and all. Certainly it contributed in a very great measure to the high reputation which Ruhleben achieved among the authorities. Once the government was established, we put our shoulders to the wheels of progress and social reform to improve our position, in which direction we also achieved so many wonders as to earn approbation from our wardens. All things considered we were given a tolerably free hand, no appreciable opposition to our projects being offered so long as we were prepared to defray the total financial expenditure incurred. Naturally, every suggestion had to be submitted to the authorities, but they refrained from exerting more than a fatherly jurisdiction over our operations.

The reform proposals were so sweeping, comprehensive and diverse as to necessitate the formation of a host of committees, each of which became responsible for the work embraced in its sphere of influence. Thus we had educational, theatrical, trading, training, and numberless other committees, and I doubt if any municipal community at home could point to such a record of industry and indefatigable labour as characterised the straightening out of the kinks in this internment camp. Among these varied committees was one of especial significance. We could



do nothing of distinct account without money. There was plenty of this attribute in the camp, so the first essential action was the foundation of a Treasury, and the establishment of a sound financial system to enable the public works to be carried promptly through to success.

To this end was inaugurated what might be described as the Common Fund, which was kept going by contributions from every conceivable source of revenue, such as profits on trading, amusements, and other diverse occupations and recreations. When it was decided to establish mixed trading within the camp private enterprise was not generally favoured, inasmuch as it was conceded that such would tend towards the exploitation of the majority to the exclusive benefit of the minority. Brief experience, as narrated in a subsequent chapter, sufficed to establish this circumstance in a conclusive manner.

Communal trading was one of the first projects to be attacked in grim earnest. In the beginning those who desired to supplement the meagre official rations by the purchase of dainties and other luxuries, beyond what were obtainable from the canteen, were compelled to patronise a tiny, cramped stall known as the "Pondside Stores," to the benefit of its proprietor, a German woman. Thereupon a row of shops were built, the necessary materials being bought out of the Common Fund. As a reminder of home this shopping thoroughfare was facetiously dubbed Bond Street, and at one end led into an open space, also humorously known as Trafalgar Square. Each shop was set aside for a specific enterprise, such as dry goods, provisions, tailoring, outfitting, and so on. The responsible government purchased and maintained the stocks for these establishments, completing their purchases through German houses, and also provided and remunerated capable managers and assistants, who were paid a salary of five shillings weekly from the Common Fund.

The Government being responsible for the purchase and



selling prices of the various commodities—the profit on the goods was settled by a committee—naturally the Common Fund began to grow rapidly, trading within the camp being brisk. The majority of the prisoners either were receiving remittances from home, or a weekly allowance from a fund controlled by the American Embassy; while there were also many in the camp who were well blessed with the sinews of war, owing to the indiscriminate manner in which the British element in the country was rounded up and interned. By the time I returned home the Common Fund had grown to impressive proportions. The transactions within the camp amounted to thousands of pounds within the course of the year.

Although profits were cut fine, and business was conducted on the “small profits, quick returns,” basis, the annual aggregate balance was somewhat startling. It was co-operative trading upon a big scale and pursued under peculiar conditions, but no one could dispute its success. This big favourable balance on the commercial and amusement undertakings furnished the funds for a wide variety of other purposes. One salient feature characterised Rühleben life—nothing was free; every enterprise being drawn up so carefully as to ensure a profit. When the German authorities realised the extent of our inter-trading operations they divined a source of fruitful revenue, and accordingly insisted that they should receive a commission of  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. upon the turnover. This amounted to quite a respectable figure—“bunce” for Germany we termed it—and due precautions were taken to see that the uttermost penny was raked in. Among our number was a chartered accountant, and he assumed responsibility for the camp government’s books. This was an imposing task in itself. Often this official worked far into the night to keep pace with the commercial transactions. Competent book-keeping was imperative, inasmuch as the accounts had to be referred periodically to the authorities, who, in turn,

submitted them to Berlin, where they were audited by fully qualified officials, and the sum due to the authorities thus appraised. It was somewhat galling to us to think that we, as civilian prisoners of war, were inadvertently granting the Teuton military machine a certain degree of financial assistance wherewith to fight our compatriots, but it was an infliction which we could not escape.

The Common Fund proved an inestimable boon to the community as a whole in devious ways, particularly in connection with provisions. Many of the prisoners were denied parcels from home because their families were unable to afford the necessary disbursement. They were compelled to depend entirely upon the provision shop within the camp, and then could not acquire what they desired if the price rose beyond a certain figure. Thus, butter, owing to the growing stringency of the blockade, began to rise ominously, until it notched 4s. 2d. per pound in Berlin. It appeared as if the poorer prisoners among us would have to go without this article of food. But the problem was neatly adjusted. The trading committee was not saddled with the entire cost of the commodity. A certain sum was allocated from the Common Fund towards its purchase. This contribution, not being repayable, actually constituted a gift towards the purchase. Now the trading committee, in deciding the selling price of any article, based its figure upon its outlay, and, so far as the butter was concerned, this was reduced to the extent of the free contribution. The result was that butter was sold in the camp at a price far below what it actually cost in Berlin. But, as butter became scarcer, and the price rose to a prohibitive figure, the Common Fund contribution lost its significance. The extent of the gift could not be increased indefinitely, except at the expense of other objectives equally vital, the result being that finally butter became accessible to only the privileged few, the retail price in Germany at

the beginning of 1918 having touched 20s. per pound, and even at this figure very little was obtainable.

The Common Fund also played a prominent part in maintaining another equally important subsidiary fund. This was one inaugurated wholly and solely for necessitous prisoners. It was not a charity, but essentially a business-like proposition. To derive any benefit from this fund a prisoner had to reciprocate with his labour. There were many among us "broke to the wide," from circumstances over which they had no control. If they felt disposed to work they were ensured a small wage, running up to five shillings weekly, which pocket money enabled them to complete purchases contributing to their creature comforts.

While we made every endeavour to secure regular and continuous supplies the fates were invariably against us. For instance, a consignment of bread would come in on the Tuesday, butter on the Wednesday, milk on Thursday, and so on. The moment supplies came to hand the circumstance was announced throughout the camp. Thus on the Tuesday all and sundry were informed "Bread in," while other commodities were advertised in a similar fashion upon their respective days. Upon being notified of the fact the prisoners would line up in a long queue outside the shop in question to make their purchases in rotation. Obviously, the stock being severely limited, it was generally exhausted within two or three hours.

This system possessed certain shortcomings. Those who were flush of funds immediately purchased what they required, while those who were dependent upon their weekly wage, which was paid on the Friday, had to go without, all business in the camp being conducted on the "cash" principle. Therefore, to ensure a more equitable distribution of supplies, a few of the more affluent prisoners would club together to make big purchases of the indispensable comestibles, and hold them over until the lesser fortunate members of the community drew their wages



The latter could then buy what they wanted at precisely the same price as if, cash in hand, they had presented themselves at the shops on the days when the availability of the goods was announced.

Among our various enterprises was the establishment of a newspaper. A typewriter was secured, and with this an unpretentious daily sheet was prepared. When we secured a duplicator we were able to reel out copies by the score. For the most part the contents were drawn from the German press, supplemented by items and gossip of local interest. This enterprise subsequently developed into a magazine, published at irregular intervals, printed in Berlin, at our expense, to which the talent of the camp, pen, pencil and brush, freely contribute, and which periodical, it may be explained, constitutes a faithful mirror of life in the internment camp, and the irrepressible Mark Tapleyism of the British race under the most distressing conditions. It is a witty and live magazine, all profits from which go into the Common Fund.

While British newspapers were very much *verboten*, we were permitted to purchase German newspapers. These were brought in daily, and sold by a German girl, who from her physical characteristics, developed into one of the notorieties of the camp. For the most part the Teuton papers comprised the *Berliner Tageblatt* and "*Aunt Voss*," of which, rumour had it, special editions were prepared for our express edification, but to the truth of which I cannot testify. The delivery, however, was not exactly regular. At first we were somewhat perplexed at this eccentricity, seeing that the girl invariably secured plenty of patronage, but we soon discovered the reason. These papers were submitted to a rigid German scrutiny before being brought in. If they contained a line concerning a British success of arms they were prohibited. By such action the authorities doubtless entertained the hope of keeping us in ignorance of British military developments,



*Spick and Spanelau. The fashionable Tailors.*

PUBLISHED OCCASIONALLY. PRICE SUBJECT TO FLUCTUATION.



FOREIGN AND INLAND POST NOT YET ARRANGED. AGENTS IN ALL BARRACKS.

**A & S. U. SAUCE**

"NOTHING LIKE IT."

PRICE 50 PFENNIGS.

COPY FROM THE COVER OF A RUHLEBEN CAMP MAGAZINE.



but, if so, their deductions were grievously mistaken, because once having gleaned the reason for the non-appearance of the papers, naturally we measured British successes by the days on which the news-sheets were not forthcoming. As time wore on, and the number of blanks increased, we rightly concluded that the German army was receiving a series of jolts which it did not relish. Consequently, by prohibiting the papers, the authorities defeated their own ends. Although we were somewhat in the dark concerning the magnitude of the achievements of the British arms, we were free to speculate upon the subject.

One day we received a startling surprise. A huge bundle of newspapers was brought into the camp. We gathered round, and to our astonishment they were freely distributed among one and all. That the authorities should present us with a copy of a newspaper hot from the machines was an outburst of magnanimity which quite overwhelmed us, and our delight became intensified when we read the title, *Continental Times*. Naturally we supposed this to be a continental edition of the eminent British daily, and we grabbed the proffered copies of the paper with keen delight. But when we dipped into the contents! Phew! The howl of rage that went up, and the invective which was hurled to the four winds startled even the guard. At first we thought the venerable Old Lady of Printing House Square had become bereft, since the paper was crammed from end to end with pro-German propaganda of a most amazing and incredible description.

It was a cunning move, but so shallow as to provoke our sarcasm to an abnormal degree. We tore the papers into shreds, and cast the fragments to the four winds. Time after time that offensive sheet was brought into the camp and given away, but on each occasion we subjected it to the grossest indignities we could conceive; what it cost the authorities to endeavour to suborn us in this way is

only known to themselves, but it was a ghastly fiasco. Truly the Teuton is strangely warped in his psychology.

Yet, at intervals, the British press provoked just as acute exasperation among the prisoners at Ruhleben as the distorted statements and fabrications inseparable from their German contemporaries. One London daily precipitated almost a riot in the camp with an article entitled "Work-shys at Ruhleben," in connection with the publication of a report issued by the American Ambassador in Berlin dealing with a special and official visit to the camp. This glaring title created a feeling of intense bitterness, while even the German authorities laughed loud and long at the distortion and imagination of the British scribes. Doubtless it was issued as a commentary upon the circumstance that the poorer and more necessitous prisoners in the camp worked diligently from morning to night, while others amused themselves on the tennis courts and football field. But the statement betrayed a complete lack of knowledge of local conditions, and a lamentable ignorance of the organisation of the camp. There are no "work-shys" in Ruhleben, but there are men who work from choice and necessity to secure the weekly salary of five shillings, which is paid out of the Common Fund. Work is purposely created to keep these unfortunate compatriots in the position to secure one or two luxuries and comforts which otherwise would be impossible. Even those who play tennis and football indirectly create work, as the courts and field have to be kept in condition, while those who indulge contribute freely to the Common Fund.

An equally fantastic statement in another British weekly newspaper caused an uproar. It was stated in all seriousness that one man had been able to send home £17, which, so it insinuated, he had made at the expense of his colleagues. This story, upon its iteration in the camp, provoked a serious situation, since the man in question was receiving five shillings a week from the Common Fund, and he certainly



## RUHLEBEN BRITISH CONCENTRATION CAMP

*Financial Statement to 10<sup>th</sup> April 1915.*

## RECEIPTS

a) For Camp Fund ex American Embassy to cover distribution of Margarine, Sugar, etc. and general Camp expenses . . . . .	22,000.—
For Camp Fund ex Other Sources, viz:	
Donations, O'Hara Murray, Esq. Collections in Barracks, Proceeds of Concerts, Variety Shows, Canteens, Boilers, Parcel Post Department, etc. . . . .	21,458.90
b) For Relief in Cash ex King Edward VII Fund . . . . .	10,401.—
c) For Relief in Cash (weekly) ex American Embassy . . . . .	69,000.—

## EXPENDITURE:

## Relief afforded:

General Camp Relief, Distribution of Margarine, Sugar, etc. . . . . (a)	13,495.85	
General Camp Relief, through First Aid Society . . . . . (a)	779.58	
Weekly Relief in Cash ex Embassy . . . . . (c)	67,289.50	
King Edward VII Fund, Cash Distribution (b)	10,150 —	
Amount expended in Organisation and Upkeep of Camp, viz:		
Wages paid to interned prisoners (Latrines, Kitchens, Fatigue Parties, etc.) . . . . . (a)	3,195.20	
D. disinfecting and Sanitary arrangements, Medicines, Hospital Expenses, Funeral Expenses, Office Books and Stationery, Grand Stand Seating Accommodation and Stages, making good damage done to Camp property, Repairs to windows, Purchase of utensils such as Bread Cutting machines, Pails, Brooms, Watering Cans, etc. Shop Fixtures and Shelves Canteen Improvements, Alteration to Parcel Post Department Office, Bridging Race Course Track, Deposit to Race Course Association for permission to use ground for playing purposes, etc. etc. . . . . (a)	6,894.71	
	101,804.84	132,859.90
Cash in Hand and at Bank . . . . .	11,891.41	
Stock in Trade at Canteens . . . . .	20,266.32	
Sundry Debtors . . . . .	1,933.73	
Items paid in advance, Rent, etc. . . . .	353.—	
Sundry Creditors for Goods, etc. supplied . . . . .		9,052.78
Sundry Creditors for Cash on Deposit . . . . .		8,856.67
	135,749.30	135,749.30

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF RUHLEBEN CAMP SHOWN  
IN MARKS. ONE MARK = 1/-.

was not in the position to remit to England the sum of £17. Such will-o'-th'-wisp stories wreak far-reaching damage, and become a source of considerable irritation, which seriously affects the smooth, quiet working of the community. It may seem somewhat strange, but such "yarns" as these reached the camp within a very few hours of their publication—how, no one seemed to know. As we were helpless to repudiate them we were compelled to suffer in silence, while the British public, owing to the absence of any contradiction, is disposed to accept such statements as being true. Moreover, such wild and fictitious assertions adversely affect the status of the British press in German eyes. The latter, knowing the true state of affairs, smile contentedly, and having discovered these fabrications, logically assume the remainder of the intelligence published in British papers to be equally "trustworthy" (?). Gross mis-statements of fact published in the British press, gathered from irresponsible sources, more seriously threaten the equanimity and orderliness of the British internment camp at Ruhleben than the wildest assertions in the German press. The latter are anticipated ; the former are construed as being an outrage.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### BENEFITS OF THE COMMUNAL SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT.

THE food issue at Ruhleben has ever been one of the most vital issues, and the cause for the gravest discontent among the British prisoners. Milkless and sugarless acorn coffee, hunks of black bread, and soups of little appetising or nourishing value, cannot by any stretch of the imagination be construed into an ideal physical maintenance diet. When the economic situation in Germany was comparatively easy the average menu, so far as the mid-day meal was concerned, might be set down as soup—pea and cabbage predominating—for three or four days of the week, while on the other days we received possibly rice and prunes, or rice and sausage. On Sundays we might be rewarded with a small piece of meat, potatoes and gravy, garnished with a small portion of sauerkraut, which the authorities considered to be a great treat. After the kitchen was taken over by ourselves we sometimes received a small bun, or some other trifling delicacy, if such it might be called, for tea, but only on very rare occasions.

At intervals fish was served out to us, but it was so vile as to be invariably declined with contempt. It was quite unpalatable owing to the brine, and moreover, was generally in an advanced state of decomposition, which apparently had suffered temporary suspension owing to the prodigal treatment with salt. Even the hardened sailors, who were

considered to be the least fastidious over their food, would refuse this dish.

When we received permission to run the camp ourselves one of our first duties was to secure control of the kitchen. We saw scope for many reforms and improvements, but were somewhat dubious as to whether the authorities would allow us to take this issue in hand. But to our surprise they offered no objection. I might say that the commissariat was in the hands of a contractor, who proved to be one of the most despicable rascals among Teuton rascals. He was nothing more or less than a sheer profiteer. The food grew worse and worse, complaints being lodged almost daily. The authorities generally conceded that our "grouches" were well founded, and ostensibly strove to effect improvements, but without any tangible results.

I recall one day when we were compelled to go without our midday meal. It was one of those rare occasions when an officer from Berlin visited the camp. He proceeded straightway to the kitchen to have a look round. Fish was the delicacy in preparation and he investigated it closely. His opinion threw the kitchen staff into consternation. The fish was condemned unequivocally. The contractor protested, but he was soon forced to realise that argument with a German official is sheer waste of breath. The officer cut him short, expressed the food as being totally unfit for human consumption, and dared the contractor to serve out the fish at his peril. While those of the prisoners who witnessed the incident and overheard the altercation inwardly rejoiced, faces dropped at the prospect of no meal being forthcoming. The officer turned round and sympathised with us upon having to go dinnerless, but he emphatically declined to permit prisoners to be served with such vile food under any consideration. However, he promised us a good tea, and he was as good as his word. Not only did he have the offensive fish destroyed



before his eyes, but he waited to see that we were not robbed of our tea, which comprised rice and prunes.

Our suggestion to control the kitchen extricated the authorities from a dilemma. Complaints concerning the food had come to such a pass as to reduce them to helplessness. They were as deeply incensed against the contractor as we were, inasmuch as the Government was not being given full value for the money which was being paid for our sustenance. Time after time protests were lodged by the authorities, but the contractor invariably saved his face by stating that he was serving us with the very best material which he could obtain at the price, and that indifferent quality and quantity were entirely attributable to the condition of affairs within the country. If he could not get the foodstuffs how could he supply us with them? It was a specious argument, which appeared to quieten the agitation, but our officials knew quite as well as we did that the rascal was merely exploiting us and making money rapidly over the transaction. The contractor held full sway until we came along with our suggestion. Then the authorities, seeing the opportunity to terminate their bargain, bundled him out neck and crop on the instant, their excuse being that we, the prisoners, had taken over the whole undertaking and would become responsible for feeding ourselves. The contractor was disposed to put up a fight, but the German military have their own peculiar way of settling such disputes, and so we were left in undisputed possession.

The moment we secured control of the kitchen the whole system was overhauled. One of our number was installed as controller, while the staff was similarly recruited from the ranks of the prisoners. All were given the ruling weekly wage of five shillings. Of course, the members of the staff were at liberty to profit from "extras" so far as they could, and so long as it was not at the expense of any member of the community, or in connection with the

essential meals. For instance, such extras as hot water at odd times of the day invariably earned a "tip," in addition to the official charge for the article, but inasmuch as those who rewarded such additional duties were well able to afford it, no harm was done. It must be admitted that the kitchen staff were equally diligent in ministering to the wants of the necessitous as to the more wealthy. There was never the slightest discrimination.

Although the "chef" was not permitted to order what he required, but was compelled to utilise what the authorities provided, we benefited from the superior preparation and presentation of our meals, while the controller displayed wonderful ingenuity in rendering the less attractive food-stuffs as appetising as human endeavour could contrive. Moreover, at times, we were treated to unexpected and intensely appreciated delights. Thus, for the evening meal we might be given a dole of tea with milk or sugar, or possibly the acorn coffee was rendered palatable by the addition of milk or sugar—perhaps both. Considering the restricted scale of materials with which the kitchen was supplied, its achievements in the culinary art were remarkable.

By this time parcels were also being received freely from home, and consequently we became more dependent upon this sustenance than that provided by the authorities. Inasmuch as the prisoners had resolved themselves long since into small cliques, the system which was in vogue with my particular party was widely practised. The contents of all the parcels addressed to the members were pooled, to be shared and shared alike. The system was simple. For instance, K—— would receive a parcel on Monday. The member of the party who was fulfilling his spell of duty as orderly unpacked the parcel, noted the contents, and attached the date of receipt thereto. The more perishable foodstuffs were eaten first. On Tuesday, a parcel would come for me, and this was treated in an

identical manner. The orderly would prepare the meals, the menu varying according to the "stocks" available, and in this manner supplies were eked out to supplement, or as a substitute for, the official rations. The orderly was entirely responsible for the party's commissariat, the preparation of the meals, the preservation of the edibles, and their distribution from day to day during the period of his duty in this connection. When his term of responsibility was completed he merely handed over his stocks and records to his successor. In this way it was possible to transfer the responsibility from one to the other at a moment's notice, and that without the slightest friction or mishap, while we were generally assured of some dainty every day. As a rule we confined the luxuries from home to the evening meal, which we considered in the light of a dinner or high tea. If the parcels destined for the party arrived simultaneously, and we suffered from a temporary glut, then the other two meals of the day were supplemented by such luxuries as the supplies would allow.

By sharing out in this manner all the members of a party benefited, while those poorer members, who were denied the receipt of a parcel from home, owing to their relatives not being in the position to extend such assistance, were not permitted to feel their lonely position. The dainties were given to them in the true spirit of camaraderie and they did not fail to extend acknowledgments of their thankfulness in such directions as they could. In some instances, unfortunately, a more selfish practice prevailed. I recall one prisoner who was not only flush in pocket, but who received parcels with unfailing regularity from home. The assortment of dainties which came into his hands was astonishing. But he was never known to share a crust with a luckless comrade. He would sit at the table with a parade of luxuries—tongue, tinned vegetables and fruit, white bread, butter, and what not—set round him, and gorge like a hog, completely ignoring the meagre fare of his colleagues,



who watched him with longing eyes as they wrestled with their acorn coffee and hunks of black bread. I really think, if it had not been for the generosity of the more sympathetic prisoners in the camp, who willingly distributed such tit-bits from their parcels as they could afford, that such hogs as the prisoner in question would have been deprived of their luxuries by force. But the men, despite their famished condition, exhibited wonderful self-control, and expended their indignation in other directions. Such gluttons as these were the butt of unceasing ridicule, the victims of practical joking, and the object for spleen throughout the camp. They were harried from pillar to post, and regarded as useless "black sheep," while, whenever a request for release was refused, the howls of derisive delight which went up, forced the unpopular individual to relapse into the dark depths of his couch.

Not only did communal government bring about the centralisation of the organisation, but many beneficial manifestations of decentralisation were successfully brought into operation. Thus, under the original régime the prisoners had to present themselves at one place for their meals and refreshment, while another cubby-hole served as the *depôt* for the distribution of the black bread. It was no uncommon circumstance for a prisoner to be compelled to wait an hour or more in the "bread line," and that after a similar wait in the kitchen queue. When the snow was deep and the thermometer was hovering about zero, this was a fearful experience, many of the men being quite numbed and half senseless from the cold by the time they reached the window to receive their ration.

This system was changed. Representation induced the authorities to concede the establishment of a bread *depôt* in each barrack under the control of the barrack captain. Sufficient bread was fetched daily to ensure each man in the barrack receiving his allowance of one-fifth of a loaf per day. The *depôt* being on the spot, the long



wait in the open air was avoided, an innovation which met with widespread approval. Such decentralisation extended a further benefit. Those prisoners who were in receipt of regular supplies of bread from home naturally could dispense with the official ration. But the authorities were not permitted to profit from this circumstance. Each man drew his ration, and if he did not require it he promptly handed it over to a colleague who was in need of it.

Communal Government also enabled the postal system within the camp to be improved out of recognition. A post office was established in each barrack. The regulations permitted each prisoner to write two four-page letters and four postcards per month. Naturally, extreme care had to be displayed to keep within the limitations of the censorship, which was rigorous. Thus neither pen nor indelible pencil were permitted. Only an ordinary leaden pencil could be employed, this enabling the censor to obliterate with eraser any statements to which he took exception. Also, the writing, especially on the postcards, had to be fairly large, so as to be read with ease. Generally speaking the authorities were very fair over the postal material. If the writing were too small the postcard would be returned to the writer with a note calling attention to the reason for its refusal. But, as a rule, if the card were reposted, it was permitted to pass, the authorities being satisfied that upon the next occasion the writer would comply with the request to write in larger characters.

Official stationery had to be utilised for both letters and postcards, and this had to be purchased by the correspondents, a small stock being carried by each barrack post-office to meet the needs of its residents. We were not called upon to pay for stamps, correspondence of prisoners of war, in accordance with the terms of the Hague Convention, being franked free.

The duties of the postmen were straightforward and the system worked with astonishing smoothness. The incoming mail reached the camp early in the afternoon, and about three o'clock the postman from each barrack presented himself at the official bureau. Here he secured all the letters addressed to inmates of the barrack to which he was attached. Returning to the barrack the letters were again sorted, those for the horse-boxes in one, and those for the loft above in a second pile. The latter were handed over in bulk to a sub-postmaster attached to the loft. When he received his bag of correspondence he assumed a central position among the clamouring crowd of inmates, calling out the names and handing the missives over to their rightful owners. The arrival of the post in the loft presented a never-to-be-forgotten spectacle. The overwrought inmates would loiter, scarcely able to restrain their excited expectancy for a letter from home, and when the mail arrived there was a wild rush and frenzied hub-hub around the postman. When a man's name was called he gave a yell of triumph, seized the letter, and almost mad with delight tore the envelope into shreds to secure the contents, which he would read and re-read with a joy which is indescribable. The saddest sight was the dejection upon the faces of those for whom no letter had come. They would slouch to some quiet corner, almost on the verge of collapse, and there crouch, mope, and even give way to tears over the bitter disappointment. A letter from the homeland, no matter from whom it came—relative, friend, or stranger—acted as a tonic of the most bracing description. It must not be forgotten that the mail is the solitary frail link with Britain, and, if those at home could possibly take a peep at a barrack when the mail comes in, they would not fail to be so impressed by the vivid contrast of unrestrained delight and utter dejection, according as to whether a letter had been received or not, to undertake to write a note, no matter



THE RUHLEBEN POSTMEN.

We waited longingly all day for the only link with the Homeland.





how brief, to at least one prisoner every day. It is the one vehicle for transporting a prisoner from the deep miseries of Hades to the delights of Paradise.

Downstairs, among the horse-boxes, we were quick to seize upon any and every little tradition linked with home, to convey the illusion of being in Britain instead of languishing in a German internment camp. The letters were sorted out, the inmates of each box being grouped. Then a box-to-box delivery was practised. The postman went his round with his bag, gave the familiar resounding rat-a-tat-tat, and upon the door being opened, the missives were handed over to their rightful owners, or left in charge of the orderly. This pleasing fiction not only extended us infinite amusement, but contributed materially to the success of our organisation.

Collection was also made daily. The letters were posted in the barrack pillar box, and duly cleared by the postman. He kept a register of the name of the inmates of each barrack, and the posting of each letter or card was recorded. This was followed for two reasons. In the first place it offered evidence of posting, while, secondly, it enabled us to keep within the rules, since the postman was able to see, by referring, whether a writer was sending more than the prescribed number of letters and post-cards during the month. If the communication were in excess it was returned to the sender to be re-posted at a later date if he felt so inclined.

The letters were then taken to the official bureau and surrendered to the authorities. The latter also kept a register, which was religiously maintained, to keep check upon each prisoner's dispatches, their number, and dates of mailing. By initiating our system we saved the authorities considerable trouble, inasmuch as it was quite impossible to smuggle through a letter or card over the prescribed number. Indeed, we sternly suppressed all endeavours in this direction, since, otherwise, continuous

and bitter friction would have prevailed between the authorities and the prisoners. After having been received by the authorities, the letters were passed on to the censor, and upon meeting with his approval were dispatched to the homeland. But all correspondence was subject to one official rule—it was detained in the camp for ten days after posting. "Military reasons" were given as the cause for this demurrage. Consequently it takes from three weeks to a month for a letter to pass between a prisoner and home. I might mention that, although restrictions are imposed concerning the number of communications which shall be sent by a prisoner during the month, no such limitations are imposed upon inward letters.

Despite the enormous volume of correspondence handled, I must confess that losses of letters, so far as I can testify from my period of incarceration, were very few and far between. The authorities were exceedingly fair and straightforward.

The system of handling the prisoners' parcels was also free from criticism, although it naturally underwent improvement when we were able to participate in the scheme. The authorities provided a special siding at Spandau in which the vehicles laden with our goods were shunted. These trucks were cleared once a day, a special cart being retained in the camp for their transference from rail to the official bureau. While horses sometimes served for haulage, upon other occasions the prisoners themselves were recruited to serve in this capacity, but this was a task which was shouldered willingly, inasmuch as it was to our own benefit. Seeing that at least 4,000 to 8,000—afterwards from 12,000 to 15,000—parcels\* came to hand every twenty-four hours it will be seen that this enterprise was one of considerable magnitude, and I must state, in justice to the authorities, that every care was taken of the

\* Parcels are now sent to prisoners in bulk through the Central Organisation.—H.C.M.

articles entrusted to them for the prisoners.\* So far as is known, very few parcels, from the moment they were taken over at the frontier by the Teuton Government, were ever lost, although some of them reached the camp in a sadly battered condition owing to indifferent packing. In the early days there was a slight outburst of indignation. A consignment of parcels failed to reach the camp. Their transportation had been entrusted to a private organisation—not of German origin I might mention—which has always made a feature of parading its celerity of dispatch and prompt delivery. When we opened an agitation upon gleaning belated tidings of the miscarriage of our goods, the private organisation at first maintained that the parcels had never come into its possession, and when this fiction was exploded, instantly vouchsafed other excuses. Nothing was heard of the goods for some weeks. Then they were suddenly discovered, tucked away in an odd corner of one of the firm's depôts. By the time these parcels reached the camp a considerable proportion of the contents were inedible, having decomposed. After this experience the authorities decided to assume complete responsibility for the transit and delivery of all goods destined for the prisoners, and the system has worked satisfactorily ever since.

Under official administration our one complaint was the tedious wait in the queue outside the parcels' office. I have known a prisoner to wait three hours before reaching the building. But we succeeded in reducing the period of waiting to a very marked degree, and, by the inauguration of system, accomplished what the Germans had failed to achieve. Every morning, about seven o'clock, a list of the prisoners for whom parcels had arrived was written out in alphabetical order, and posted upon the notice board enclosing the boiler-house. Needless to

\* It is to be regretted the same cannot be said of the German authorities now.—H.C.M.



say, prisoners expecting parcels used to gather round this board an hour or more before the list was sent up. A prisoner would run down the announcement under the initial letter of his name and ascertain what there was for him. Perhaps one or two, and sometimes even more, were to hand. He then proceeded to the office, taking up his position in the queue, which often stretched for several hundred yards. The first duty was to secure a ticket entitling him to the parcel. The attendant, after making sure that the request was in order, gave the consignee a ticket, for which we inaugurated a charge of ten pfennings (one penny)—this was subsequently reduced to one half-penny—which went into the Common Fund. Receiving the ticket the prisoner surrendered one-half of it at another window, thus establishing the first link in the chain of claim and receipt. Then he presented himself at the window coinciding with his initial, to receive his goods.

All handling of parcels was carried out under military supervision. Upon arrival they were sorted out according to the initial letter of the surname of the addressee, and placed in a bin correspondingly labelled. Say, for instance, I presented myself at the window. The second half of my ticket was taken, and the parcel for Mahoney withdrawn by a soldier from the "M" bin. It was brought to the counter, and unpacked before an officer to reveal the whole of the contents. The latter made an examination, and all being in order, that is, no prohibited article being found, the dismantled parcel was pushed over to me, and I was permitted to take it away. Once I had surrendered the second half of my ticket and had received the parcel all liability upon the part of the German Government ceased. If any contraband were included it was merely confiscated. The system is simple and thorough. No parcel was ever touched by the authorities until it was opened before the eyes of the consignee, so that no complaints of losses in transit could be levied.



We were permitted to co-operate to a certain degree with the authorities in handling the parcels, but our staff was never suffered to open, or to touch, the contents. The result of our action was to expedite the clearing of the office, this generally being accomplished, even on the busiest days, in about two hours, while we always succeeded in coping with all parcels upon the day of receipt. In this way we were able to reduce the sojourn in the queue to tolerable limits. If a man took up his position in the waiting crowd, only to leave it before his name was called—which was done after all those for whom parcels were waiting had received attention—and presented himself at a later hour, he was fined one penny for his remissness, inasmuch as he had caused a certain amount of trouble. The only exception to this rule was when operations had to be suspended to enable the attendant soldiers to take their midday meal. Those who were still waiting, say, at twelve o'clock, were commanded to re-present themselves later, but no fines were exacted, the consequent delay being due to the authorities themselves.

## CHAPTER IX.

### LIFE UNDER THE RUHLEBEN COMMUNE.

THE concession of self-government, despite the limitations imposed by the authorities, and the military being in supreme control, exercised one supreme influence. It caused us to recognise that our future welfare depended in a very pronounced measure upon our individual and collective efforts. Restraint was certainly chafing, but occupation of the mind was an effective gloom dispeller. As time passed we could not fail to feel the general gradual relaxation of even the most rigid and steel-bound regulations. Every member of the community was compelled to admit tacitly that he could become a useful member of the community; and if one and all did their little bit, then imprisonment could be robbed of many of its terrors.

The authorities were quick to perceive the first and foremost tradition of the British character. This was our amenability to law and order, combined with adaptability to circumstances, no matter how depressing they might be. The soldiers, during their times of leisure, and while lounging within the camp, would often openly express their wonder at our preserving such an atmosphere of joviality and apparent contentment as prisoners. Making the best of it was something which they could not understand,

Crime was unknown in Ruhleben, which, bearing in mind the cosmopolitan character of the four to five thousand prisoners, drawn from every conceivable class of society, was certainly amazing. More than one of our number had "done time" in the homeland, but out there the predatory instinct seemed to have become effectively stifled. Now and again there was a slight outbreak of lawlessness, but such were few and far between, while the punishment meted out was certainly salutary in its effect. Men who infringed the rules came to fear being ostracised by their comrades as much as, if not more, than the visitation of penalties for their misdeeds by the powers that reigned supreme. Of course, devilment was responsible for a certain amount of friction with officialdom, but such manifestations of lawlessness, if such they may be called, were rather the direct and outward visible result of confinement. Some of the more irrepressible spirits had to give vent to a certain amount of exuberance, and at times displayed a fiendish delight in thwarting authority, but these expressions were invariably curbed among ourselves, and without official interference.

When the military guard was withdrawn from within the camp an immature force of police, recruited from the ranks of the prisoners, was brought into being. In other words, we undertook to police ourselves. Subsequently, with the coming of the communal system of government, this self-protection became elaborated and established upon a firm footing. A police force, such as would have done every credit to a small British town, was created. It was constituted upon the lines practised at home, although it may, perhaps, be more accurately likened to our special constabulary, introduced in these islands upon the outbreak of war, seeing that the duty was quite honorary.

There was a "chief," with the usual array of subordinate officers, the force, when fully constituted, numbering 45 strong. The utmost care was observed in selecting the right men for this peculiar, and I might say at times extremely delicate enterprise. As a matter of fact it was regarded as a signal honour to be selected a policeman, and there was spirited competition for a vacancy when it occurred.

The camp was patrolled night and day, the constables after dark proceeding upon their duties in pairs. The authorities readily assented to this action, once its beneficial effects became apparent, and co-operated with us. The insignia of office was a small blue and white armlet worn round the cuff when on duty, together with a small enamel badge carried in the lapel of the coat. Furthermore, a certificate was presented to each member. In the early days the night work was somewhat unenviable, especially when the weather was unkind, but directly sou'-westers were supplied from the Common Fund, defiance could be safely hurled at the elements, even when they were most unpropitious. For night duty we were served with a small electric flash-lamp, but we were not allowed to carry a defensive weapon of any description, not even a baton, although, fortunately, so far as my experience was concerned, the occasion never arose to display force of any description to maintain law and order.

Perhaps our system was somewhat unique in one respect. We were allotted specific terms of duty. When the spell was completed, the constable going off duty proceeded to his barrack to call the colleague who was to follow him, and accompanied him to the police station. The first-named then "signed off," being quite free until his next spell came round.



Our duties were of the most varied description. During the day-time we controlled the queues which lined up outside the shops to make purchases of whatever commodity was on sale that day, the parcels office, the theatre in the evening, and so on. We had to see that the many rules and regulations were obeyed, especially at night-time, and to conduct all those breaking bounds back to their barracks. Warnings generally sufficed to reveal to the irrepressible the folly of their ways, and they invariably accepted our suggestion to return to their quarters and get off to sleep. No one but the police was permitted to roam the camp after the prescribed official hour, and even the civil constabulary had to acknowledge the higher authority of the military. While patrolling it was by no means uncommon for a challenge to be hurled from a soldier outside, upon detecting sign of movement within the camp. "Polizei!" went the retort, to which was returned a cheery "Good night!"

During the day-time our work was sometimes more strenuous, especially when the water became a nuisance after a severe rainstorm. Then the police set to digging ditches to allow the accumulation to escape from the causeways, and this was no light task. But after the main road was driven through the heart of the camp, the necessity to become navvies upon occasion was eliminated.

We became so effective in our work that the military did not hesitate to call upon us for assistance when faced with a pressing difficult task. One of the shops in the camp was owned by a German woman. She paid 1,000 marks—£50—to secure possession, which circumstance will serve to convey a tangible impression of the commercial possibilities within the camp. But something or other

went wrong, causing the military to intervene. The cause I never fathomed. The guard closed the woman's shop, and then bundled her out of it. Enraged she gave vent to her feelings, only to become apprehensive of the subsequent effects of her rash action. She was carrying a valuable stock, which the military demanded should be removed instantly. To ensure this being done the authorities went so far as to eject the contents themselves, but, owing to insufficient strength, they called upon the civil police to lend a hand, the operations being conducted under the surveillance of an officer. That woman was turned out of the camp, lock, stock and barrel, was forced to rest content with what goods she could recover, had to mourn her loss, and to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the exordium that if she were caught in the vicinity she would speedily learn that German authority was not to be readily defied. The next day the shop was re-opened under entirely new management, with a new stock.

While the police within the camp were conceded certain privileges the boundary was strongly delimited. Two incidents I can recall will serve to illustrate the rigour of Teuton military control, and the absolute indifference of the authorities to any extenuating circumstances. One afternoon, while returning to my barrack, I ran into a colleague of the force. He looked absolutely dejected and miserable. He expressed his inability to assume that night his spell of duty as a policeman owing to family troubles, and I undertook to relieve him of it. Then he narrated how he had received a letter from home saying his father was dying. He was urgently wanted, inasmuch as it was imperative to complete certain negotiations concerning the transfer of his father's business to him, the son. This man had lived in Germany for nearly the whole of his life, was well known in German commercial circles, while the business at stake was one of considerable importance. He approached the authorities, seeking permission

to return home for a few hours, but he was persistently put off, though not openly refused, upon some pretext or another, until the final decision of the authorities became immaterial. His father died while he was on the rack of expectancy. What became of the business was never known.

Another prisoner, also a resident for many years in Germany, received a letter informing him of the precarious condition of his wife, who was not expected to recover. The lady in question was a German, but at first this fact did not weigh with the authorities one iota. However, his persistence brought about a certain degree of relaxation under the peculiar conditions which prevailed. The authorities would permit him to return home for a day or two, provided he defrayed the cost of the journey, as well as the travelling expenses and maintenance of a soldier who would accompany him as escort.

"But I haven't a cent in the camp!" he protested. "Grant me a pass, and I'll pay when I return."

But authority would not listen. The terms had been stated. The prisoner could accept or refuse them as he felt disposed.

The man was in a quandary, and those of us who were familiar with the situation somewhat feared that he would become demented, as he moped and reflected upon his wife's condition. Thereupon we whipped round, made a collection, secured sufficient funds to enable him to comply with the official requirements, and he departed home, radiant at our expression of practical sympathy, but with the soldier at his heels. He returned to camp within the specified time, but the soldier's holiday had been a somewhat expensive item, the relaxation from rigorous military duty and living being appreciated by the escort to the full.

Gambling was very much *verboten* in the camp, and the police were entrusted with the difficult task of its subjection.



Seeing that cards were played in the sanctuary of a private horse-box, or under the protection of an outpost, who gave the alarm at the first glimpse of the police, it became impossible to repress this manifestation of recreation. At one time gambling secured a very firm hold in the camp. While in many instances the cards were secured by some roundabout expedient, in others they were home-made, and so diminutive, as to slip into the waistcoat pocket without attracting attention.

As a rule the most formidable crime with which we had to cope was drunkenness, but as may be imagined, such outbursts were very few and far between, for the simple reason that, owing to the rigid regulations, alcohol was difficult to procure within the camp. Now and again a bottle of whiskey would be smuggled in, at a prohibitive figure. The small party thus able to gratify desires, generally imbibed freely if unwisely, and consequently brought themselves within reach of the stern arm of the law. Seeing that the punishment for this crime was excessively severe, and that the "drunks" as a rule were not too intractable, we generally succeeded in getting them back to their barracks without the authorities becoming aware of the delinquency.

But one outbreak brought its due reward. Two of the least orderly members of the community happened to hear that the cellars of the Grand Stand were stocked with alcoholic liquors, the property of the restaurant, and reserved for use on racing and gala days. They broke into this cellar, and went the pace for all they were worth. As a matter of fact they consumed so much as to become disorderly and irresponsible. The military found them wandering through the camp, and as may be imagined, they were at once hauled off to the guard-room. Next day they were taken before the authorities, and were promptly given the exemplary sentence of three months.



While we maintained a police force we were denied the right to establish a magistracy to deal with even the most trivial offences. The authorities firmly declined to grant such a concession, maintaining that it would undermine the military supremacy, since we naturally would be prone to regard a punishable offence in a light totally different from that of the officials. But the authorities were fair. Infringers of the local laws were not entirely at the caprice and mercy of the camp authorities. Serious cases were promptly referred to the civil authorities at Berlin, were given a trial according to German judicial procedure, and sentenced by a magistrate.

I keenly appreciated the police duty while I was in the force, since it came as a welcome break to the daily round of toil, but at last I reluctantly relinquished my connection therewith. It happened in this wise. I was on duty one night when I suddenly descried a form, fully attired, slinking in the shadows, and making way towards the prison fence. I divined in an instant that a prisoner was attempting to escape, and at the same time knew the futility of his effort. When I accosted him, he thought all was up. I cross-examined him closely, and he confessed his intentions, maintaining that internment was affecting him to such an extent as to induce him to believe that he would go mad if he stayed another night in his barrack. I saw that the man's mind was firmly made up, and I was between two stools. As a policeman it was part of my duty to place the man under arrest, and to denounce him to the authorities, since we were particularly requested to suppress—in fact to report—any attempt at escape. On the other hand I was fretting from incarceration as much as he, and, inasmuch as there was not a man among us who would hesitate to make a bolt for it at the first favourable opportunity, I concluded that I should be in error if I performed my ostensible duty.

Observing the man's excited condition I prevailed upon

him to return to his barrack and to lie down, otherwise, if he were not careful, he would be prostrated with illness. He demurred at first, but when I discreetly explained to him that he was not in a fit condition to make the attempt, and that owing to his highly strung nerves and excitement he would be caught before he had gone a hundred yards—to escape from Ruhleben demanded remarkable presence of mind, cunning, and one's wits sharpened to razor-edge keenness—he finally accepted my advice. I escorted him back to his "diggings" and saw him made snug and comfortable.

My reflections over the incident were not of the happiest. I, myself, I must confess, was nursing a scheme to get away, and concluded that it would be traitorous to betray a colleague. There and then I decided to resign from the force, and communicated my intentions to my sergeant before going off duty. Moreover, I knew full well that the prisoner whom I had caught would make an attempt to be off possibly the next night. If I happened to be on duty at the time, I felt that I should be compelled to turn a blind eye in his direction. But to have done so would have jeopardised the very existence of the police force. The Germans were uncannily astute in their control of us. If they should catch the runaway, as I felt positive they would, they would be able to trace his movements, and to such perfection, as to deduce the time when he broke out of the camp. Then, naturally, their first enquiry would be concerning the whereabouts of the night patrol at that time. Explanations might be vouchsafed, but I knew sufficient of German nature to see that they would unhesitatingly accuse the policeman who happened to be on duty as particularly remiss, if not an actual accessory to the act, and would probably decide to re-assume the internal guard, which we did not desire. Moreover, I had no wish to make acquaintance with another German prison and its maddening solitary confinement. So the police

force knew me no more. My resignation was timely, because almost immediately after, the opportunity for which I had been patiently waiting to secure my return to Britain, suddenly revealed itself. I embarked upon this hazardous enterprise, confident that I was not imperilling any of my comrades, or abusing any position of trust, by my self-preserving action. While, according to the lyricist, "a policeman's life is not a happy one," I certainly derived distinct pleasure from serving in the force at Ruhleben.

Although the authorities fed us according to their own standards, we could supplement this meagre monotonous fare if we possessed the requisite funds, and were in the position to take advantage of our situation. The Casino was available to those who were given a "pass" by the doctor, to the postmen and others within certain limits. This establishment was under private control. Here one could get a dinner, comprising a small portion of meat, gravy, and two vegetables, at 3s. 6d. a head. If one knew the ropes this could be washed down with wine, and sometimes with something stronger, hailing from Scotland, although the latter cost 15s. a bottle. A prisoner acted as waiter, and he was always ready to assist us all he could. The hours were from 6 to 7 and 7 to 8 p.m., the diners being served in two batches. Needless to say I became an habitu   of this establishment. Occasionally, to foster an illusion of home, we did things in style. We used to form a festive dinner party at the Casino, paying a visit to the theatre afterwards. We could not get to the West-end of London, so contented ourselves with our imagination, supported by some appearance of gay life and the White Way, and had a "night out."

Now, Mr. Proprietor tumbled into hot water. The authorities got wind that he was making a good thing out of his illicit wine list, and came down upon him suddenly and unexpectedly. In consonance with German official



procedure, which always acts promptly, and stands no nonsense or palavering, he received short shrift. He was hustled out of the camp, his store of liquors was discovered and confiscated, and he padded the hoof to pastures new, a wiser if poorer man. After remaining closed for a few days, the establishment was re-opened under entirely new management, and with the strings of officialdom pulled more tightly round it. But the Casino was one of those little attributes to the camp which made a prisoner's life somewhat more endurable—if he possessed the wherewithal to go the pace. In my instance, I found it indispensable, inasmuch as although the food was very expensive, its superiority to the official camp food could not be gainsaid, and my health in Ruhleben was never so excellent as when I was able to take advantage of the good, if limited, fare which the Casino was able to offer during the term of its active existence.

Under communal government it became possible for everyone within the camp to fulfil some useful service, either to individual profit, or to the benefit of the community as a whole. Consequently, once the scheme had got into its stride very few slackers or shirkers were to be found. There were certainly no drones, because we discovered that occupation, no matter how trivial it might seem, served as food to the mind, and acted as an effective palliative against moping and dejection. Possibly the one phase of effort which attracted the greatest measure of attention, and which achieved the most impressive success was education. A powerful committee was formed, and the curriculum embraced virtually every object under the sun, from teaching the dusky members of the community, who hailed from the darkest corners of the Empire, the rudiments of English to trigonometry; archæology to arithmetic; microscopy to carpentering; navigation to the study of languages, both live and dead.



An expert in every ramification of education was to be found to serve as exponent or tutor, while there was a ready response of pupils. The system was very simple. Those who were prepared to teach were enrolled as tutors, classes were arranged and scheduled in the time table, the arrangements being so perfected as to keep the building set aside for this purpose going at full pressure from early morning until late at night. No fees were officially exacted, although a nominal fee of five shillings per course was instituted. But, seeing that many of the prisoners were so disadvantageously placed as to render the payment of even such an apparently insignificant sum a distinct hardship, it was not demanded. On the other hand, those of us who were in a superior financial position were expected to contribute towards the support of the scheme, and were always ready to do so. The fees were paid into the Common Fund, and assisted in the acquisition of the requisite materials and books. The majority of the tutors themselves fulfilled their tasks free of all remuneration. If private education were desired tutors were free to extend it, but in this instance they were at liberty to impose what charges they considered adequate. Private tuition was not controlled by the educational committees, and consequently the fees paid for such inculcation went into the tutors' pockets.

The schoolroom was the loft of Barrack 6. This had formerly been tenanted by several prisoners in the usual manner, but the American Ambassador, upon one of his visits of inspection, unequivocally condemned it as unfit for human habitation, since it was nothing but a black hole. He ordered the residents to be removed and accommodated elsewhere. After its vacation it remained derelict for some time, until at last the educational committee decided to put it to useful account. Electric lighting was installed, while the space was divided into classrooms by the aid of canvas partitions. When transformed the school presented a fairly

attractive appearance, and proved ideal for the purpose to which it was applied.

A notice was posted at the entrance setting forth the precise times at which the various classes were held. The subjects were so numerous that the loft was taxed to its utmost capacity throughout the whole day and far into the evening. No difficulty was experienced in finding competent teachers for the various subjects; the camp swarmed with brains. The interned sea captains and marine officers taught navigation; a microscopist took the class in this branch of science; and so on.

I, myself, contrived to squeeze in a period of my busy day to teach the "blacks" the rudiments of English. For the most part, these dusky prisoners were numbered among the crews of the British ships lying in port at the time war was declared, and who were transferred, first to the hulks at Hamburg, and finally were sent *en masse* to Ruhleben. The majority either knew but a few words of English, or could not speak the language at all, while in one or two instances they could only point to a smattering of German, in addition to their respective dialects.

One man, a native of Sierra Leone, was totally ignorant of any words beyond his native tongue, and indeed, fell a victim to the effects of war on his very first voyage.

These pupils proved extremely attentive, persevering and apt, and by the time I left, the greater number were able to read, write and speak simple English quite fluently. Immediately previous to my departure each sent me a letter expressing his thanks for what I had done. The language was naive, but its very simplicity was impressive, and aroused the favourable comment of one of the chief officials of the camp. I requested permission to bring these missives away with me, but the officer in question reluctantly expressed his disability to comply with the favour, since it was contrary to the regulations, although he confessed that, had the matter been left to his personal discrimination,

he would readily have handed them over to me. However, he undertook to do the next best thing. He sealed them in a package, inscribed my name and address upon the covering as the owner of the contents, and placed them in safe keeping, so that I might be sure of receiving them when peace had been restored.

The most popular occupation among the prisoners, especially those of middle age, was the study of languages. There were numerous accomplished linguists among us, and it was possible to secure the assistance of a competent tutor in any civilised tongue. Some wrestling with this subject might be seen squatting either in their bunks, or in odd corners, deeply immersed in grammars and other books pertaining to the language in which they were interested; others walked about the camp memorising the lessons, studied patiently and determinedly at the classes, or endeavoured to subjugate the problems in peace and quietness by self-instruction. A visit to the Grand Stand sufficed to reveal one way in which languages were being mastered under private tuition auspices. "Professors" might be seen pacing to and fro, with a pupil on either side, explaining rules, repeating idioms, memorising conjugations, and indulging in conversation. It was an uncanny babel, French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Japanese, German, Chinese, and English being heard in a frantic wrestle for supremacy.

Even practical or technical education was not omitted from the list. Necessary appliances within limitations were acquired and installed, and the work was conducted on essentially practical lines. Thus, for instance, the carpentry class was a combination of theory and practise. The camp maintained a carpenter, who was a skilled man of his craft, to execute odd jobs. The pupils accompanied him on his rounds, and by following his operations, or even participating in the work, contrived to master the intricacies of woodworking. The boiler-house proved an excellent



training ground for those who embraced the subjects of steam-engineering and electricity. The establishment and working of our own local government offered a valuable object lesson to those interested in organisation, while business training was not neglected. As a matter of fact nearly every prisoner was engaged in the mastery of something or other.

The official programme laid down when the government was first established was somewhat limited in its scope, but as time passed it grew with striking rapidity. A host of suggestions were submitted to extend the curriculum and the sphere of operations, the result being that the "civil authorities," as the camp government was colloquially called, were induced to embark upon enterprises which were never contemplated in the first instance.

There was one problem which became the concern of every prisoner. This was his teeth. Owing to the absence of facilities to submit our jaws sufficiently to the functions for which they were designed, since there was no necessity to indulge in mastication, except possibly in connection with the bread, our teeth promised to develop into a serious physical trouble. In the very early days our food was almost exclusively of the sop variety. Soup constituted virtually the staple diet, and in order to render the bread more palatable, we invariably broke it into pieces, and allowed it to soak in the wishy-washy liquor. We were not provided with either spoons, knives, or forks, and so were compelled to drink the contents of the basins. At a later date we were able to secure these attributes to the table at our own expense. It is not surprising, therefore, that the question of the teeth promised to assume alarming significance, and it was only by unremitting attention that dental troubles did not assume alarming proportions. The authorities never provided us with a skilled dentist except at our own expense. The doctor, naturally, was



ignorant of this subject, since it was beyond his province. Consequently, those who failed to devote the necessary attention to their teeth speedily began to experience distress and pain.

I fell a victim to the teeth affliction, a decaying molar racking me both night and day. Upon making enquiries among the prisoners, I was recommended to one individual, who was said to be a skilled dentist. At last I tracked him to his quarters, and an appointment was made to deal with my irreclaimable tooth. I do not suppose an offending molar has ever been extracted under such extraordinary conditions. I kept the appointment, and it was at the hour that the occupants—six in all—of the horse-box were discussing their midday meal. But this did not perturb the dentist. I was not delayed until he and his colleagues had finished their repast. He jumped up immediately, rummaged among his belongings for his instruments, and forthwith wrestled with my tooth, while his comrades continued eating their meal as unconcernedly as if I were miles away. It was an exciting and prolonged tussle, with the odds on the tooth, while I must confess that it was not free from considerable personal discomfort. Six times the dentist made his attack upon my jaw, and six times was forced to retreat, but with a fragment of the molar as a prize on each occasion. Naturally, there was a grim struggle between the dentist and myself, which at times threatened to overthrow the table, but the prisoners did not pause in their meal, except to dodge the flying evidences of the operation. I think all of us were mighty glad when the extraction was decided to have been completed, that is, judging from the invective which graced the air.

But extraction did not bring me the expected relief. Within an hour or two my face began to swell alarmingly, while the pain became excruciating. I could not touch a morsel of food, nor could I snatch a wink of sleep. I

tolerated the agony for five days, and then I was put on the track of a second prisoner who was also a dentist. I ferreted him out. He carefully examined my mouth, and then comforted me with the information that something serious had developed. I asked him to come to my relief, but he resolutely declined, although he possessed his complete outfit of instruments, maintaining that it was totally impossible for any man to practise this delicate art in the camp, owing to the complete lack of facilities, and hinted that it would have been better had the instruments used on my jaw been submitted to sterilisation. A third prisoner, who specialised in this profession, and whom I consulted, expressed a similar opinion, commenting that he "thought blood poisoning had set in!"

Back I trotted to the prisoner who had pulled my mouth about so unceremoniously. He had another probe, declared that every piece of the molar had been removed, but was unable to extend me any advice as to how to treat the wound, inflamed and suppurating, which had resulted. I was in a quandary, especially when one of the other dentists, upon a second consultation, advanced the theory that I should have to place myself in the hands of the authorities, and submit to a delicate surgical operation in a properly equipped institution either at Spandau or Berlin.

This was the very eventuality of which I had been going in dire dread. Had I reported myself to the doctor, he would instantly have requested the name and address of the prisoner who had assumed the responsibilities of practising dentistry in the camp. This was absolutely forbidden by the regulations. To denounce the dentist was to expose him to a term of three months' imprisonment, the penalty exacted for such an infringement of the rules. I had no desire to compromise a fellow-prisoner, so I decided to treat the injury myself, at least for a time, and my comrades in the horse-box in which we were then residing,

extended useful assistance ungrudgingly. My efforts were successful, so that the *dénouement*, which at one time appeared to be inevitable, was avoided. But I never submitted myself again to the tender mercies of a Ruhleben expert dentist, practising surreptitiously!

The teeth issue assumed such a serious aspect as to precipitate a crisis. Then it was decided to establish a dental hospital upon a small scale within the camp. The authorities, when approached, raised no objection to the proposal so long as they were not called upon to contribute financially towards the scheme. A building was set aside, and this was equipped with everything of the very latest type, at our own expense, supplemented by tangible assistance from the American Embassy. The two dentists whom I had previously consulted during my tooth trouble, and who had refrained from extending assistance owing to the unfavourable conditions, were appointed dental surgeons, and from that moment all anxiety in regard to teeth vanished. The equipment of this dental surgery probably constituted one of the most costly individual enterprises ever attempted in the camp, but the results achieved fully justified the venture and capital expenditure incurred.

Eye trouble was another physical ailment to occasion considerable anxiety, which is not surprising. Oculism was similarly beyond the medico appointed to the camp, but the authorities attempted to meet this issue by delegating an eye specialist to visit us. However, we were called upon to defray the cost of all eye treatment we received. But the official oculist was not a popular specialist. When his services were enlisted, he would remark, "Oh! You want an examination of the eye! Well, it will be 7s. 6d.!" And he would not lift a finger until the fee was paid. The charge was considered to be extortionate; the majority of prisoners could not afford it, so suffered in silence. That oculist certainly failed to build up a flourishing and lucrative practice in Ruhleben.



Many of the prisoners have contracted short-sightedness, cataract, or some other malady incidental to vision, only from the lack of adequate lighting facilities within the barracks—especially during the very early days—indifferent food, and wretched sanitation. I have seen prisoners striving to write and read under the scanty illumination offered by a hard-puffed cigarette, or crouching as closely as they could against the dirt-begrimed tiny window through which the daylight endeavoured valiantly to struggle. The gloominess of the lofts, which was never entirely dispelled, even with electric lighting, taxed the powers of the eye to an enormous degree. Few prisoners will come back from Ruhleben without permanent defective eyesight, the direct result of the abominable conditions which prevailed in the camp. This was one of the shortcomings which the communal government was unable to remedy, although on more than one occasion it was suggested that we should establish our own eye hospital, and defray the services of competent oculists selected from the prisoners themselves, if such were to be found, or maintain the appointment of a competent German specialist out of the Common Fund. But the recommendation never proceeded beyond the projected stage, probably owing to reasons of cost.

The civil authorities did succeed in founding a lazaret within the camp. It was established in close proximity to the official doctor's bureau, so that this worthy had merely to exert himself to the extent of walking through a door in the party wall. This hospital was equipped upon a comfortable scale, and was immeasurably superior to the official establishment provided for cases demanding surgical treatment. But, unfortunately, the provision of this indispensable auxiliary only served to render the inestimable doctor more indifferent than ever, although there was a certain manifestation of method in his madness. If he were summoned to attend a patient lying in his bunk he would refuse to visit him. His



argument was naive. If we told him that the patient was unable to come to the surgery, he merely retorted that under such circumstances the "man ought to be in the hospital." When we pointed out that he was not so sick as to demand removal to the hospital, he then replied, "If the case is not sufficiently serious to warrant hospital treatment then the patient is well enough to visit the surgery!" So it will be seen that the official had us both ways. Many a sick man would willingly have gone into hospital to ensure a visit from the doctor, but he hesitated because he did not want to tax the facilities of this small institution, feeling that the accommodation should be reserved for those who were in more serious need of such attention. If every sick man, to force the doctor's hand, had gone into hospital, it would have been continually overcrowded, while the waiting list would have been sufficiently long to have kept every bed occupied for months.

It was the establishment of autonomous government which served to render life in Ruhleben more bearable than it had been before. The inauguration of trading enabled us to gratify whims and fancies, and allowed us to render our unenviable residences more comfortable. Thus, when the party, six all told, of which I was a member, moved from the loft to a horse-box, the authorities granted us three beds, or rather we should describe them as apologies for beds, seeing that they were merely boards nailed to battens, and raised a few inches above the floor, with straw—subsequently wooden shavings—stuffed into a sack to form a mattress. Yet three of us were forced to be content with the couch the floor itself offered, and this in defiance of the fiat issued by the American Ambassador, that every prisoner's bed was to be clear of the stone paving. However, we remedied the deficiency ourselves. We purchased the requisite material and fashioned three extra beds. Then I bought a powerful acetylene lamp, which I utilised to light my business premises, but took home with me

every night to flood our apartment with a brilliant illumination. At a later date we secured batteries, and diligently wired our horse-box, to provide a small electric light over each bed, which, provided with an independent switch, enabled any one of us to read and write after the others had retired to rest, and that without disturbing them by general illumination. Little embellishments were continually being introduced, but exclusively through our own efforts and at our own expense, the upshot being that ultimately our flat was as snug and cosy as a prisoner could wish. If only the feeling of confinement had been less irksome, the food adequate in quantity and appetising in quality, and the atmosphere within the barracks less reminiscent of a sewer, life in Ruhleben would have been comparatively happy.

## CHAPTER X.

### OUTDOOR RECREATION AT RUHLEBEN.

DURING the closing weeks of the year 1914 life at Ruhleben was intensely drab and dreary. There was nothing with which we could while away the many hours of enforced leisure. The only forms of recreation available were promenading up and down before the Grand Stand to the monotonous thundering music of the guns undergoing test at Spandau, playing tag, and other similar juvenile games generally associated with the mean street incidental to the crowded lower quarters of a big city.

Indeed, the camp conjured up vivid memories of the congested corners of our towns and cities. The "lungs" were extremely limited, the only open space being the small area between the buildings, apart from the strolling area before the Grand Stand, which likewise suffered from an absence of pretentiousness. When the weather broke the utter aimlessness of our existence and the lifeless prospect only served to drive our spirits to a still lower ebb.

Great excitement, as already mentioned, attended the appearance of a ball contrived from rags. It was something to kick and throw about, while we indulged to the full in the exhilarating game of rounders, which afforded us a certain amount of that exercise of which we were in such sore need. When a rubber ball came to hand we became as excited as a host of gutter-snipes, and pseudo,

or modified baseball, became invested with an accentuated interest and excitement. But even the best of games become tiresome when pursued for hour after hour without a break, and so we cudgelled our brains to devise variations and novelties in regard to recreation so far as the limitations of a single rubber ball would allow.

I have a very shrewd idea that the lack of excitement even told upon our guards. If they had anticipated lively times keeping us in order they experienced bitter disappointment. Time hung heavily on their hands also, but the authorities provided them with a certain measure of occupation and movement by recourse to "lining-up" the prisoners. The stentorian order "Line-up" was heard throughout the day—roared so frequently as to become the joke of the camp.

"Line-up" was the brief order to parade. Every prisoner, no matter where he was or what he was doing, had to present himself. When we had lined-up we were counted and re-counted several times to make not doubly, or trebly, but octuply certain we were all there. The first "line-up" of the day came between 6.30 and 7.30 a.m., preparatory to the march to the kitchen to receive our morning meal. The time varied according to the priority of the barrack to proceed to one of the two kitchens first. We went in rotation, at intervals of about 15 minutes, but the arrangements were so conducted that the times varied from day to day for parading each barrack. Thus Barrack 1 would be first on Monday, second on Tuesday, third on Wednesday, and so on, so that each barrack took it in turn to occupy pride of place at the kitchen.

Then came the "Bread-Line," a source of infinite amusement and joke and gibe unending among the prisoners during the earliest days, but one which assumed a distinctly pathetic interest some time later when provisions commenced to grow scarce. We were paraded to proceed to fetch the allowance of bread and again "lined-up" when



it was to be shared out. In the former instance so many men were selected to go to the "cubby-hole" serving as the bread store to receive the issuance in bulk for a whole barrack. There was a "line-up" before and after the mid-day meal, and another previous to the receipt of the evening meal.

These were the scheduled "line-ups," if such they may be termed. In addition there were what we described as emergency "line-ups." The camp was provided with a bell—curfew we dubbed it in our sarcasm—which no prisoner was permitted to ring unless he was prepared to receive a spell of imprisonment for committing what was regarded as a serious breach of the regulations. Whenever this bell was rung every prisoner had to respond immediately and to "Fall-in" on parade.

The official "line-ups" were regarded tolerantly by the prisoners. A certain amount of time was occupied in the process, which left us so much less to worry away according to our inclinations and ingenuity. But the emergency parades were regarded with ill-concealed ill-humour, because many were frivolous, and, I believe, were imposed as a test upon the guards more than anything else. They reminded us of the practise calls at fire stations, though with less useful purpose. But we had to parade, and possibly were called upon to withstand a vexatious ordeal. An official would stroll up, possibly to treat us to a brief harangue or dissertation upon some topic. At other times he would make, as it were, an inventory of the prisoners, conveying the impression that the authorities were engaged in sorting us out in preparation for some new decisive action, which might redound to our benefit, and possibly speedy release.

Thus the officer would call out, "How many married men here?"

Up would go a show of hands from the married prisoners.

"How many prisoners have German wives in Germany?"

Another show of hands.

"How many Irishmen are there here?"

A further display of hands.

"How many have businesses in Germany?"

And so it went on. Many of the interrogations were so puerile as to provoke us to smothered laughter, but repetition staled their novelty and interest. After the novelty of these interrogations had worn off, murmuring and grouching in subdued tones could be heard on all sides.

What little open space we possessed for such recreation as we could derive underwent decided diminution when the authorities encroached upon it to build two further barracks. One of these new residences, Barrack 13, was colloquially dubbed the "Blacks' Barracks," from the circumstance that the dusky members of the fraternity were segregated and accommodated here. And these poor fellows suffered terribly. The building was of wood, and although a pipe-heating system was installed it was totally inadequate. Those who had been raised in tropical climes suffered severely from the cold. They shivered and slunk about in a semi-lifeless condition, and were ravaged sadly by illness. But they preserved a wonderful cheerfulness through it all, doubtless becoming infected with what jollity we could muster with decided effort.

Among the prisoners were acrobats and gymnasts. They suffered supremely from the effects of over-crowding. They strove valiantly to pursue their practises to prevent themselves from getting rusty, but they were compelled to give them up. Acorn coffee, black bread, and soup form a mighty poor diet upon which to essay to prosecute such exhaustive and physique-taxing work. In fact, every prisoner, who was accustomed in normal times to pursue strenuous exercise to maintain himself in the pink

of condition, felt the absence of facilities and the low calorific value of the miserable food served out to us to an acute degree.

But one prisoner, whom we nicknamed "The Cat," absolutely refused to become the victim of rigorous Prussian rule. From the day after he arrived he indulged every day in his round of physical exercises or Swedish drill. The wretched food did not succeed in quenching his enthusiasm or determination, while even the weather failed to dissuade him. One of his exercises provided the camp with infinite amusement; indeed, it suggested his nickname. It was a kangaroo-like hop or jump on both feet with hands on hips, which we construed into a cat-dance on hot bricks. We used to chip, banter, and rail at him unmercifully, gathering round him and mimicking the barking of dogs. But he was not perturbed in the slightest. He accepted the sallies good-naturedly and carried his exercise through to the bitter end.

That man earned and carried the admiration of the camp. Despite our short commons he preserved himself in envious health. When the communal government was established he undertook to teach those who felt so disposed Physical Culture—a course which seemed sadly out of harmony with the conditions. But his offer met with ready and wide acceptance, and he succeeded in producing one of the finest bodies of men in the camp, trained to a high pitch of efficiency, and who went through their evolutions in squad with the precision and smoothness of a chronometer. The displays of his class constituted one of the most widely appreciated diversions of the community, and, incidentally, it may be stated, "The Cat" succeeded in forming the largest individual instruction or educational class in the camp, being 80 strong.

His pupils were induced to acknowledge the physical advantages they received from his tuition, and they reciprocated in a practical manner. They held a round



robin and roped in sufficient subscriptions to purchase a handsome gold watch, which I engraved, and which was presented to him. Even the German soldiers were accustomed to gather around him when he was conducting his class in the open air, following his work with mouths agape and eyes distended, and casting envious eyes upon the sleek, healthy appearance of his pupils. That persistent prisoner merged from being the laughing stock of the camp into one of its most respected and popular citizens.

It was somewhat interesting to remark, how, at the first opportunity, the prisoners enthusiastically embraced what might be termed the Britishers' first and foremost sport—boxing. We had many first-class exponents of the noble art among us, and directly the requisite accessories came to hand, a boxing craze set in. The "cracks" readily secured pupils, and bouts were in progress throughout the livelong day. Then we established a scientific ring, provided with all the necessary attributes. Boxing tournaments became one of the features of Ruhleben. Battles royal were fought and won, and they were waged in no half-hearted manner either, although insufficiency of sustaining food robbed the men of stamina. When we commenced to receive parcels from home "condition" underwent a marked change and attained a far higher level. The excitement which prevailed upon the auspicious occasions must have compared favourably with that which reigned when our past-masters of this art were wont to match themselves in the open-air rings of the British country-side, while the betting was heavy upon the favourites. At some of the contests the spectators went almost frantic, the shrieks and howls of triumph easily drowning the sonorous thundering of the guns at Spandau.

But the German officials and military regarded these exhibitions with ill-disguised hostility. The Teuton is a wretched sportsman, and he could not understand where we



discovered any delight in knocking one another about for the sheer amusement of the thing. But the greatest resentment was manifested because we were fostering and developing the great British tradition—the fighting instinct. Anything in this direction was regarded askance. However, the authorities, although cherishing disapproval, never openly suppressed this recreation. They evinced their displeasure in devious subtle ways. One circumstance never failed to arouse comment and a certain degree of hilarity. If a boxing match were in progress the military guards, although armed with a rifle and at liberty to use it freely if provoked, discreetly kept in the background. Indeed, upon such occasions they strove to efface themselves as much as possible: it was rare to catch a glimpse of the hated uniform at such times. Although the contestants went at one another hammer and tongs, never an attempt at interference was made, so the fights were fought to the legitimate finish.

Notable exponents of other prominent British games were also to be found among us. Football was represented by "Steve" Bloomer and "Freddie" Pentland. The moment the camp had become resigned to a long existence these two sportsmen essayed to get things going in their own particular sphere. They wrote to friends at home asking for a football and the other dozen and one incidentals necessary to pursue the game along orthodox lines. When a kindly sympathiser answered to the extent of a football the camp went crazy with delight. Life assumed a vastly different prospect. That ball revived our drooping spirits as speedily and completely as a sight of the yellow metal dispels the despondency of a prospector. This was certainly worth kicking about and the fun we extracted from that football would pass all comprehension.

The congestion and overcrowding resulting from the encroachment upon our available space to receive the two additional barracks, caused us to look through the bars

of our prison upon the expanse of the trotting and racing tracks more wistfully and longingly than ever. If only we could get out there what a time we would have? To concede us even a small corner would induce us to regard our oppressors in a more complacent light. The authorities were approached, but they did not appear to be impressively struck with the brilliancy of our proposal. Still, the mere circumstance that they did not refuse the application point-blank seemed hopeful. We all knew something about the Teuton Circumlocution Office, the tangle of red and blue tape which prevails, and the long and tedious journeys from department to department which a request had to make before a decision could be given.

Eastertide, 1915, was a joy-day to us. A section of the forbidden ground, which we nick-named the "Field," was thrown open to us, and was to be available all the while we behaved ourselves. We received the concession with wild jubilation, and the foremost celebration was a football match, between two sides captained by Steve Bloomer and Freddie Pentland respectively, the Governor of the Camp, Baron von Taube, honouring us by kicking-off. The match was the occasion for a mild maffick. We all felt like a troop of schoolboys who had been unable to visit the playground for days on end.

One must not run away with the idea that the authorities were manifesting unwonted generosity to us in this connection. They were gracious enough to concede us a stretch of the green sward on which to indulge our desires for strenuous amusement, but we paid £50 from the Camp Fund for the advantage. Moreover the hours when we were to be at liberty to roam this enclosure were rigidly set forth. They were from 9 till 12 in the morning, and from 2 till 4.30 or 5.0 in the afternoon. During the height of the summer, when the days were long, we received an hour's extension, the "Field" being kept open till six o'clock. We were warned that, if we did not abide by the

official times, we should incur the risk of being deprived of our playground, but we were so thankful for what we had received that even the wildest among us was prepared to fulfil the official regulations to the letter. The Camp Police was entrusted with the task of clearing the enclosure at the specified hours, but no difficulties ever were encountered in this connection : the concession was far too valuable to be abused.

Once we had received facilities to enable us to indulge in the grand winter game to the full, the football-fever gripped one and all relentlessly. Bloomer and Pentland took the matter in hand and evolved a magnificent organisation. Membership was open to anyone who cared to participate, and each barrack speedily contributed a crack team. The two foregoing organisers undertook the task of captaining and training the enthusiasts, and with them time must have sped rapidly, bearing in mind the demand imposed upon their prowess, knowledge, and generous co-operation. In the beginning the training of the teams was not free from its comical aspect. The giants recalled their football days and triumphs at home, polled up in conscious majesty, and expressed their determination and delight at the opportunity to show their compatriots what they could do in this realm of sport. But they had forgotten to make due allowance for their relatively long period of idleness during which they had grown rusty, and failed to recognise the fact that our official food was not conducive to staying power. The teams started off promisingly enough, but evidences of distress were speedily forthcoming on all sides. It was truly a test to discover the survival of the fittest, but one and all confessed that he had signally failed to appreciate how much he had fallen out of condition.

Training and more nourishing food—received from home—worked wonders. When the season was at its height the matches which were played between the teams



of the barracks were worth going miles to witness. Each team had by this time received an appropriate nick-name. One was known as the "Canaries," from the colours sported on their jerseys—we did the whole thing in first-class style, and by hook or crook fitted ourselves out to the uttermost detail. Another was dubbed the "Cock-a-Doodle-doo's," from good-natured bragging of their footer prowess and so on.

Once football was got into its proper swing "League" games were inaugurated to infuse greater vim into the matches, both among the players and spectators. The supporters of each side rolled up in overwhelming strength, and they vied with one another in cheering and spurring their representatives quite as keenly as the teams battled between themselves.

But the event of the season was the "Ruhleben Cup Final." The scenes witnessed at the Crystal Palace upon the occasion of the decisive contest for football supremacy were mild in comparison with those incidental to the internment camp. What we lacked in numbers from the spectators point of view was more than redeemed by lung-power. Every effort in the cheering line was reserved for this great day, and our wardens were bewildered by the strenuous manner in which we let ourselves go. One would have thought, from the deafening final cheer which went up from 4,000 odd throats, that the British Army was crossing the Rhine, instead of representing merely a pæan of praise to the crack barrack football team of an internment camp!

Our two football giants have fought and won on many a football field at home, but I think both will agree that they have never enjoyed the thrilling game so much as they have done at Ruhleben. The camp turned out *en masse* to follow the struggle: restraint was thrown to the four winds. The soldiers hung around wondering how we could possibly become so demented over such a



pastime, and asked us on all sides however we could give way to such exuberance when we were really prisoners and incarcerated in an internment camp! To which the boys invariably replied, in language possibly more forcible than explanatory, that "football enabled them to forget their imprisonment for a time, so what did they care?"

Football was the Sport King until the weather grew too hot for such strenuousness. Then King Willow came into the arena. The success which had attended the efforts of the football enthusiasts in seeking the paraphernalia pertaining to that pastime from home, induced a similar attempt to be made to secure the wherewithal to pursue the summer game with equivalent enthusiasm. Bats, balls, stumps, and nets poured into the camp, and the vogue of King Willow, during his accepted season, was every whit as triumphant. Everyone was invited to become a member of the Club, the nominal fee of sixpence being levied for permission to join the active ranks of either the cricket or football enthusiasts.

Here, again, inter-barrack matches were played to decide the champion team of the camp. In order to prevent the complete monopoly of the field for match games, the latter were generally restricted to the afternoon, which left the "Field" clear for three hours during the morning for practise at the nets and scratch team encounters. The big matches were played after the Australian system, that is, they were fought to a finish, whether they lasted one, three, or five days, and the enthusiasm was quite as frantic and maintained as in connection with the winter game.

The cricket matches, however, were not free from one humorous aspect which was entirely absent from the football bouts. As a rule play was possible from 2 to 6 p.m. without a break. But the needs of the inner man and Prussian system enforced an interlude. About 4.30 the

barracks began to "line-up" to proceed to the kitchen for tea. As this hour approached, those who had no parcels from home with which to regale themselves suddenly scampered from the field to appear in the parade. This issue affected both players and spectators alike, and it was amusing to see those of the former who were dependent upon the kitchen, suddenly dashing across the ground as if bereft, one and all bent upon a common purpose—to be at the kitchen in time. Some exciting impromptu sprinting matches, affording infinite delight to those spectators who were able to forego the official meal, were witnessed. The prisoners who could dispense with the camp fare used to linger until the drawing of stumps and the clearing of the ground, when, upon repairing to their barracks, they discussed a substantial final meal leisurely and enlivened the gloom with red-hot gossip concerning the game.

Even golf was not permitted to pass unrepresented, although it was played under distinctly unorthodox, or at least unconventional, conditions. It started in quite a humble manner, when we had to rest content with the curtailed playground skirting the barracks. Clubs and balls were procured and the exponents of the game amused themselves with short strokes and putting, empty condensed milk tins being sunk into the ground to serve as holes. The golf enthusiasts, not to be outdone by their footballing and cricketing colleagues, approached the authorities with the request for facilities to indulge in their favourite pastime. But this was a more difficult matter to decide. Cricket, football, and other games could be played upon the one ground, according to season, but golf, from its character, demanded special arrangements. At first the requests did not meet with success, but finally a possible way out of the *impasse* was discovered. Golfers were given the exclusive and unfettered use of the field for at least  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours every day. They were at liberty to enter the

"Field" at 7.30 to 8.45 a.m. and to remain there undisturbed until 9.0 a.m., when, of course, the ground was thrown open to the general public, otherwise the camp as a whole. The golfers were free to play just as they liked during this exclusive period, but after the public entered they were to refrain from driving. The regulation was very explicit upon this point, the authorities maintaining that indiscriminate driving might be injurious to other prisoners. Accordingly, after nine o'clock, the golfers, if they decided to continue their game, had to content themselves with short strokes and putting.

To participate in this game entailed compliance with more rigid rules than prevailed in connection with the other general pastimes. It was rendered somewhat exclusive through official action, owing to the privilege of entering the "Field" at an early hour and receiving its free unrestrained use for a part of the day. No prisoner was permitted to join the Golf Club unless he could produce satisfactory evidence of being a member of a recognised Golf Club at home. By imposing this condition the authorities succeeded in preventing every man-jack of us suddenly developing into a golfer, merely in order to get a further  $1\frac{1}{4}$  or  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours' pleasure upon the "Field."

Tennis also claimed its devotees. A section of the cinder trotting track was set aside for this game, and for which another £50 had to be paid. Three courts were laid down in the first instance, but proving insufficient, four further courts were subsequently added, making seven in all. The nets and other impedimenta were hired from a German firm. Tennis was essentially the pastime of what might be termed the *elite* of Ruhleben. The running expenses were necessarily somewhat heavy, while the game failed to make general appeal, being voted as "too tame" and feminine. Moreover the club was somewhat exclusive, the membership fee being one guinea for the season, which effectually



debarred it from the greater number of prisoners, even had they been anxious to participate in the recreation. In addition, further expenses were incurred and had to be defrayed among the members of the club.

It was the Tennis Courts and their animation which played a prominent part in one of the official reports concerning Ruhleben, and which certainly served to convey an erroneous impression to the general public at home of life in a German internment camp. No mention was made in the report in question concerning the payment of £50 for renting the small section of track involved, or that the Club was self-supporting and only accessible to the privileged few. Nor was there a word to illustrate the advantage of these courts to the poorer prisoners. The courts had to be kept going, and this duty was carried out by the workers of the camp at the Tennis Club's expense. The members were not disposed to undertake some measure of toil, not being in need of money, but their very abstention provided work for the more necessitous, and indicated the way to secure five shillings certain per week as a wage wherewith to acquire certain trivial creature comforts, which otherwise would not have been accessible.

Athletics were not neglected. A Sports' Committee was formed under the ægis of the communal government, and, owing to the success of this movement, this Committee prospered until it became one of the most important and powerful in the Camp. The first meeting of significance was held on Whitsun Monday, 1915, which served to convey a tangible idea of the possibilities in this direction. The events were varied and attractive, ranging from running, walking and sprinting matches to contests of a more mirth-provoking character. Some idea of the importance of this initial meeting may be gathered from the circumstance that the prize list comprised no fewer than 22 silver cups and 122 silver medals, the cost of which



was defrayed from the Committee's funds. Everyone was invited to participate, the entrance fee being nominal. The whole of the day was given over to this meeting. The prizes were awarded at a later date, after I had been able to complete the essential engraving of the inscriptions. The crowning feature of this auspicious event was the presentation of a silver cup to the Baroness, the wife of the Camp Governor, who frequently honoured us with her presence, although unfortunately she was prevented, owing to the rigid regulations, from extending us material assistance in the improvement of our situation.

Another diversion which proved a brilliant success—while it lasted—was a big snowball battle, with which we endeavoured to liven a dreary spell of winter. Several days were engaged in the preparations for this Homeric struggle. The sides were selected, each comprising from 150 to 200 combatants, while we raised entrenchments, built fortifications, and prepared huge supplies of munitions in the form of snowballs. The troops were trained in true military fashion and the battle was fought with rare gusto. Unfortunately it was summarily interrupted by the authorities. The soldiers had gathered round enjoying—as spectators!—the fun, but as we warmed to our work, and became excited, shots went wild, and the military unwittingly received one terrific fusillade. They took umbrage and intervened, with the result that we had to sound the “cease-fire.” I have every occasion to remember this event, inasmuch as one of the opposing side, in his excitement, picked up, not a snowball, but a substantial piece of brick, which he hurled at me. It caught me fairly, squarely, and decidedly forcibly upon the head, knocking me over like a nine-pin, and causing me to be considered a real casualty.

But the snowball fight revealed two striking facts. The one was the veiled opposition of the authorities to anything

pertaining to fighting, even in jest. They watched us narrowly as we performed military drills in anticipation of the coming day, and followed our evolutions closely. Even in this mock combat they were compelled to acknowledge the subserviency of the British to discipline, ability to act in concert like the parts of a perfect machine, as well as our manifestations of initiative and enterprise. The way we went at it was also an eye-opener to the soldiers, provoking one or two to comment that if we fought with such fierce determination and gusto in a mimic conflict with snowballs, what should we be like in the real thing? They had full occasion to satisfy themselves upon this point a little later upon the Western Front, as we learned for ourselves.

The second fact which arrested our attention was the effect of environment upon some Britishers. Among our number were many who were Germans in all but birth. They had lived in the country since their cradle days, and had become saturated thoroughly with German methods, mannerisms, ideas, and meek subserviency to military rigour. Their sympathies were avowedly German, and they were typically Teuton at heart. Some of these individuals came within the zone of snowball fire, and their instant action so arrested the attention of both sides that we turned round and pelted them unmercifully, resuming our internecine war when we had hounded them from the spot. But at the drenching with the snowballs these prisoners crumpled up completely. They were terrified, hid their heads, and bolted from the scene like startled rabbits. At close quarters they were so intimidated by our yells as to turn livid with fear, crouched like whipped dogs, and evidently thought their last hour had come. It was difficult to believe that they were of British extraction: every British instinct appeared to have been eliminated completely. It was this display of abject cowardice which caused us to reflect, after the snowball strife was

over, and to wonder among ourselves as to whether these craven wretches were not a source of insecurity among us. We decided to talk and act discreetly when in their company, a circumstance in which we had every occasion to congratulate ourselves at a later date. But fun in Ruhleben is always fast and furious while it lasts.

Deprivation of the use of the "Field" was regarded as a severe punishment, the authorities having inwardly digested the delight with which we roamed this open space and revelled in our games. On one occasion it was closed for three successive days, we having been deemed guilty of some offence against Teuton propriety. But, as a rule, closing for one day served as the penalty for a misdeed. Still, even to be forbidden its use for one day was sorely felt. On such occasions we used to gather and peer more forlornly than formerly through the fence upon the expanse of inviting sward, our chagrin and discomforture being more acute after having tasted the pleasures it afforded.

One incident which caused this punishment to be visited upon us is worthy of remark. It was the Kaiser's birthday. A huge flagpole was planted in the camp and a workman was brought in specially to complete the final arrangements preparatory to its use. Naturally, upon the celebration of the Emperor's natal day the German eagle was hoisted amid typical Teuton "Hoch-hochs." When we trooped out of the barracks and caught sight of the hated emblem of Kultur we could not refrain from giving vent to inward cursings, gnashing of teeth, and smothered vituperation, but we studiously withheld all outward and visible signs of our resentment.

We were loitering around gazing idly upon the flag fluttering in the breeze, when, to our amazement it suddenly fell to the ground. Excitement mounted to fever pitch. What



had happened. Was the Fall of the Flag a happy augury of the ultimate collapse of the Germanic Empire. Our drooping spirits rose at the thought. We felt disposed to give rise to a sardonic defiant cheer, but we controlled ourselves. It would have been construed into an unblushing manifestation of *Lese Majeste*.

We looked on wonderingly, and presently the German officials, who had observed the precipitous descent of their emblem, hurried up in high dudgeon. They examined the cord. Yes! As they had surmised, some detestable *schweinehund* of an Englishman had severed the rope! The clean cut of the tool was there in evidence. We were promptly paraded, treated to a violent harangue, threatened with this, that, and something else, and finally were told that we should be forbidden the "Field."

When outraged German dignity had expended its exuberance, the Captain of the Camp stepped forward to parly. In polite deferential language he explained that no Britisher had been guilty of such misconduct as was alleged. In artfully veiled words he intimated that no prisoner, much as he might detest the German flag, would be so disrespectful or foolish as to cut it down in an internment camp. The explanation was received with ill-grace, and with conspicuous reluctance we were dismissed.

The true reason for the flag's untimely and undignified fall was soon forthcoming. It was discovered that the German workman who had been entrusted with the erection of the flagstaff, while completing his final adjustments with the axe, had bungled. A mis-stroke and the sharp edge of the tool caught the flag-rope, severing it with the exception of one strand. The workman, after surveying the damage inflicted, came to the conclusion that it would be unnecessary to replace the rope: the remaining threads would be more than sufficiently strong to fulfil the designed duty. And so it did until Boreas got frolicsome, when the strain, precipitated by the flag flapping in



the wind, caused the final and sole restraining strand to collapse. And so down came the flag. Naturally, upon finding out their error and the falsity of their accusation, nothing more was said. German officialdom never admits a mistake. We regained the use of the "Field" immediately. But the Fall of the German Flag constituted a topic for animated discussion for a considerable time among us.

## CHAPTER XI.

### INDOOR ENTERTAINMENTS.

WHILE outdoor recreation remained at a very low ebb for several weeks, indoor diversion was far worse, for the simple reason that it was conspicuous by its complete absence. The conditions were far from being conducive to any manifestation of merriment or jollity. Consider the situation! The barracks were wrapped in darkness; not being relieved by a glimmer of light beyond the glow of a cigarette, pipe, or the evanescent flicker of a match. We were left in solitary communion with our thoughts, which were of the most pessimistic and morbid character. The long and dreary winter evenings dragged with exasperating slowness, and the wonder is that the more dejected of the prisoners, from prolonged moping and melancholia, did not become demented. They were querulous to an extreme degree. A man might be jocular one moment; the next he was in a frenzy of bad temper, ready to hurl with fiendish force a clog, or some other missile at the head of some individual who was contriving to be merry and bright while he could not.

The introduction of one or two candles relieved the gloom to an appreciable degree, and the most was made of the slender illumination thus afforded. When artificial lighting, even of the most primitive description, was forthcoming, I endeavoured to pass the evenings in some useful occupation. I kept a diary, which I sedulously posted up every

day. I was deeply affected at being compelled to leave it behind in compliance with the inexorable law that nothing was to be taken home by those who were so fortunate as to secure their release. But that diary afforded me infinite delight. The brief sentences it contained I elaborated into more intelligible notes, which I then translated into longer and more coherent and detailed passages, finally committing a lucid narrative to paper. I purposely wrote the material over and over again, each successive effort being more elaborate than its predecessor, to kill time. And I took a huge pleasure in writing my final version in microscopical characters, crowding several hundred words into the space of a single sheet equal in size to the leaf of a reporter's note book. On many an occasion I whiled away eight solid hours in this manner. Invariably midnight had passed before I had completed my self-appointed task. One night I only missed being haled before the authorities for this heinous offence by the proverbial inch. It was such a narrow squeak as to give me a fright. My sheets of notes had become an inextricable tangle because I had forgotten to number them consecutively. I rigged up a kind of table, and set these notes out. I was deeply engaged sorting them into their proper sequence when the door unexpectedly opened to admit the soldier on duty. The table was a sea of papers.

With one swift movement I swished the lot together, extinguished the light, and hopped into my bed. The sudden extinction of the light flummoxed the guard. Being plunged into sudden darkness he was rendered as helpless as an owl upon whom has been flashed an electric torch. He dared not move for some minutes, lest he barked his shins or came a cropper by stumbling over a slumbering form. When he had regained his senses, and had switched on his electric torch—every soldier on duty was thus equipped—punctuating the action with a torrent of

invective in the vernacular, and re-flooded the loft with light, he was baffled. I was apparently as sound asleep as the rest of the prisoners. He had not been quick enough upon entering the door to grasp my identity, which was fortunate for me, although I think he must have had a shrewd opinion that I was the culprit, because he gave me a rough kick. I started up, simulating a sleeper suddenly awakened from his dreams, blinked, rubbed my eyes, and muttered something incoherent. The soldier eyed me narrowly, but evidently thrown off the scent by my affectation of rudely disturbed slumber, concluded that he had made a mistake, and after gruffly bidding me to lie down again, shuffled off, a completely beaten sentinel.

Those who were not disposed to emulate the birds of the air, and to repair to their bunks with the waning of winter's daylight, used to gather in the long corridor affording access to the horse-boxes. They lounged and mouched about in the darkness, smoking, giving vivid expression to the "hell-of-a-hole" in which they were living, or endeavoured to enlighten the depressing atmosphere by relating anecdotes, jokes sadly forced and jarring, grouched and grumbled, shuffled and mumbled, but nothing more.

One night, someone in the gloom shouted the suggestion that they should have a sing-song. Someone routed out a small box, and then there was a call for voluntary talent. But no one was forthcoming; there was not a prisoner who was in the mood to voice a song. Many calls were made, but for a time they went unanswered. Then one man timidly approached the box, mounted it, and commenced a sentimental lyric which he knew by heart. It was a timid attempt, with voice sadly out of tune, while the song itself was far more depressing, being one of the favourites of the homeland. Its recital aroused memories, which in turn gave way to expletives concerning our captors.



The singer had not gone far before he was peremptorily ordered to "shut up"; he was twanging the heart strings too wildly.

The prisoners were not in the mood to listen to sentimentality. Had a Caruso got up and attempted to warble something about "Home, sweet Home," or "Love's Old Sweet Song," he would have been howled down unmercifully before he had got through the first line. It would not have mattered how fine his voice; the prisoners were not disposed to accept sentiment at any price. They wanted something rollicking; something with a good swing to it. The words were immaterial; indeed, some of the songs were the most inane ever sung or heard, but they went down like good red wine. There was one in particular which always raised the roof. I do not recall its title, but one line I shall never forget. It ran, "And the Ghost walks underneath the floor!" That drew the crowd. It was always bawled forth with a roar which shook the barrack; repetition did not damp its vociferous rendition. Bang went the feet in accompaniment to the movements of the spook. That anything to do with bogey-men or eeriness should ever have made such a strong appeal to the miserable dejected prisoners of Ruhleben may seem somewhat remarkable, but the fact remains that it tickled the British palate in that camp more than anything else in the singing line during those far-off days.

One night, when there was a lull in the entertainment, if such it may be called, a prisoner yelled to a colleague, "Now, then, B——! You can give us a *turn*! Come on, out with it!"

B—— was unable to evade the unexpected invitation, and somewhat hesitatingly mounted the box. This prisoner had lived nearly the whole of his life in the country, and facially and in his mannerisms, bore a greater resemblance to the hated Hun race than to the British fraternity. We awaited his turn with keen anticipation. He started.

But he had not gone four words before pandemonium was let loose. This man had the temerity to attempt something which we would not condone at any price. He essayed to sing a German song in the German tongue !

If ever an outrage were committed upon the Britishers in Ruhleben that was one of the worst. The sound of the hated language roused the audience to frenzy. The box was rushed and the unfortunate soloist became the butt of an infuriated crowd. They hustled and pommelled him without mercy, and each blow only served to rouse the anger and cat-calls of the crowd to an accentuated pitch. Things took a very ugly turn within a matter of moments. The sing-song which had commenced earlier in the evening free from incident, threatened to develop into a riot. B——'s sympathisers and colleagues took sides with him, and the fight was fast and furious while it lasted. But the timely intervention of the guard dispersed us, and thus brought the outbreak to a sudden termination. Needless to say, after this incident, no prisoner ever had the courage to get up and attempt to treat us to a song in German. It was more than his skin was worth.

Subsequently this offensive vocalist, by virtue of his outspoken sympathies with the German nation, was released upon condition that he joined the German army. He did so, and was drafted to the West front. Here an honest British bullet laid him low ; he paid the extreme penalty for his treachery. When the news reached the camp it was received with the utmost satisfaction, and prompted an immediate choral rendition of " And his ghost walks underneath the floor." That was the only contribution to his obsequies which we considered to be fitted to the occasion.

One evening the party lounging in the corridor decided to enliven things a little by an impromptu and exceedingly unskilled exhibition of clog dancing. Our feet were shod with hard stiff wooden soles, and the pattering of several

dozen feet thus encased, and plied with vigour, raised such a babel of noise as is difficult to describe. At all events, the guards declined to tolerate it, and we were abruptly cleared out. I must mention that at that time our captors, from their swaggering attitude towards us, resented all our spontaneous efforts to liven the weary hours. Their one objective was to keep us down in the dumps, and perpetually fretting and moping, but they found the task beyond their powers, owing to our grim determination to get some fun out of our dreary life by hook or by crook. To attempt to suppress some of the prisoners was akin to endeavouring to extinguish a fire with petrol, while, unconsciously, the guards themselves contributed to what meed of pleasure we derived. They stopped our sing-songs in the barrack corridors, by ordering us to move on. They suddenly discovered that congregating in the passage-way constituted an infraction of the regulation forbidding prisoners collecting in gangs and parties.

At the time I arrived the camp did not boast a single musical instrument. At least, although one or two of the prisoners possessed instruments, they were safely stored away, owing to the lack of facilities for practising. For instance, when Godfrey Ludlow, the eminent Australian violinist, was trapped in the internment net, he succeeded in securing permission to take his violin, which he prized very highly, and which was distinctly valuable, with him, but for months he scarcely touched it. Indeed, he seldom removed it from its case, except to reassure himself that it was not deteriorating from its prolonged inactivity and enforced storage in uncongenial quarters for such a finely-toned delicate instrument.

But one night the gloom was broken by the strains of a musical instrument. The lover of music may perhaps cavil at the term "musical instrument" being employed, seeing that it was either a mouth organ or a Jew's harp! I forget



which of these two instruments of torture has the distinction of first being heard in the camp of Ruhleben, but it was one or the other. But directly the strains arose there was an outbreak of fiendish jubilation. At last we had secured a means of accompanying those vocalists who were disposed to entertain the community; while the instrumental solos! They threw us into ecstasies of delight, especially the "Darkies," who went nearly raving with joy. I recall how the prisoners crowded round the lucky possessor of the instrument, listening intently, and urging him to keep going for all he was worth. A few weeks later, if we could have encountered the men who invented the mouth organ and the Jew's harp, we would have torn them limb from limb. Such is the fickleness of human nature; but in our case there was every reason for this subsequent undisguised hostility against these two instruments.

We were subjected to the infliction of a mouth organ and Jew's harp craze. A veritable boom set in. They were purchased by the score from a Berlin house, and from morning to night the camp was a racket of discord, which set the teeth on edge. Our animosity, though displayed against the instruments, was really intended for the owners, inasmuch as they were acquired for the most part by men who did not know how to play them, and who never would master their intricacies, even if they practised till Doomsday. But the less competent the owner the more industrious was he in his practise. Those who had invested in a Jew's harp would squat in a corner and twang away as if their very lives depended upon it, to the distraction of their colleagues lying and sitting around. At times the air grew thick with missiles flung at the heads of the offenders, but they suffered no dismay; they kept going, ignoring the fusillade. To make matters worse the majority of the mouth organs were of the cheap and nasty Teuton genus, and when the players pitted themselves against one another,



the resultant row was as if all the furies in Hades were howling in torment.

Fortunately, the mouth organ vogue did not last long, although it gave way to another, and, if possible, worse affliction. A prisoner succeeded in getting hold of a mandoline. This was a distinct relief, and somewhat soothing. Then two or three stray violins crept in, as well as a guitar, while whistle pipes came in by the dozen. It was not uncommon for twenty to thirty assorted musical instruments to be playing simultaneously in a barrack, and each wrestling with a distinctive tune! For the most part the instruments were cheap and deficient in musical qualities, while the owners, almost without exception, knew little or absolutely nothing about the "weapons" which they had secured, and which they regarded with such pride, while their musical talent was not even incipient. One can conceive the resultant effect in a barrack. Each musician would practise diligently, scraping, blowing, or twanging as the case might be, at his exercise, and deaf to the efforts of his comrades. If their attempts disturbed him he would merely proceed with greater vigour in an attempt to drown them. Twenty or thirty different instruments, wheezing, shrieking, coughing, and grunting with as many different tunes simultaneously, produced a musical *tout ensemble* which Strauss himself could never excel—it had the much-maligned German band beaten to a frazzle, while "Electra" constituted a haunting rag-time in comparison.

Music in Ruhleben, during the early days, had sufficient vexation to infuriate the most placid breast. But if the auditors were in the minority they had to suffer the ordeal in silence, to chink their ears to escape the awful din, or get out. If they were in the majority they took the law into their own hands, and either drove the disturbers from their quarters or forced them into quietude. But even objection was tempered, so far as possible, with mercy.

Suppose the members of a horse-box, six in number, included two budding musical geniuses. The effect of the vote was to compel the twain in question either to go outside to pursue their studies, or to practise while the other tenants were absent. But if the musicians outnumbered the non-players, then the latter either had to submit to the infliction or decamp.

During those strenuous musical times many funny and strange sights were witnessed in the camp. Thus, in the case of the horse-boxes, the bunks were disposed in tiers, three on each side, somewhat reminiscent of the sleeping quarters on a liner. I have seen the occupants of three superimposed bunks sitting up, their legs dangling over the side, and all going together in concert but not in harmony. The occupant of the top bunk would be wrestling with "Rule, Britannia!" on a tin whistle; the man in the centre would be trying valiantly to scrape out something like the melody of a Schumann Nocturne on a violin; while the prisoner in the lowest bunk would be steeple-chasing the strings of a guitar into more or less recognisable strains of "Come back to Erin." Possibly on the opposite side the owner of a bunk would be sucking out "The Swanee River," from a mouth organ. At the table would be the other two inmates, one striving to read and the other to write, amidst the unearthly row.

Things came to such a pass that a revolt seemed imminent, but matters were settled by a compromise. The solution was effective, if not drastic up to a point. All the musicians in a barrack were bundled into a small room at the end of a building, in which there was scarcely room enough to move when fully occupied, and given complete freedom to play one against the other. For a few minutes Bedlam would reign supreme. Then the door would open, and one discomfited musician, his instrument tucked under his arm, and his face red with exertion, would slink disconsolately to his bunk. He had been defeated in the

unusual contest ; could not hold his own against his rivals in harmony, and so had retreated despondently. Another, then another, and another, would retire in turn until at last perhaps only three or four players would be left together, and they would continue in their efforts until physically exhausted, when silence would prevail to allow the non-musicians to seek the appreciated company of a favourite author or to write in peace.

But even the coralling of the musicians in the end room of the building was deemed to be insufficiently protective ; unmusical discordant strains, when emitted with sufficient force, have the unhappy knack of travelling a long way. So we decided to banish the aspiring virtuosos from the barracks altogether. There was a small cubby-hole outside into which, with a great effort, a complement of instrumentalists could be crowded. They were consigned to this with the intimation that there " You can kick up as much noise as you darn well please." But this reserved apartment did not meet with the thanks which it deserved. It was so small that the instrumentalists had to stand back to back, and were packed so tightly as to be scarcely able to move their arms. But we took a fiendish delight in chaining up the " Mad Musicians," even if the violinist did have to lean out of the window to play his instrument.

I recall one incident. I was passing the practise-room, out of the window of which the violinist was leaning as usual. It was raining heavily, and the instrument was dripping like an umbrella.

" Say, old man ! " I ventured to the player, " your violin's getting wet. Why don't you take it inside ? "

" I can't ! " he wailed, plaintively, letting up for a moment ; " I can't turn round ! "

" Then why on earth don't you stop ? "

" I can't ! " he reiterated, " until someone goes out ;

I'm fixed here, like in a vice, and have got to go on playing whether I want to or not ! ”

I left him battling with the rainstorm and his rebellious instrument, the strings of which, becoming soddened, were playing strange capers so far as tune was concerned, as they gradually and persistently contracted.

Only one element of the camp appreciated these practising bouts—the “Darkies.” They would gather round, their mouths wandering round their faces, revealing their ivories, in delight as they listened to the gurgles, hiccoughs, gasps, and ouishes coming from the instruments. It was only those individuals who are able to find pleasure in the banging of a tom-tom, who were able to extract any charm from listening to a band practise as it was pursued in Ruhleben in those dark days.

In striking contrast to the foregoing were the impromptu recitals to which we were occasionally treated by the “masters.” Now and again, after the musical wave had swept through the camp, Godfrey Ludlow would withdraw his treasured violin from its case, and in the silence of the loft or horse-box would settle down to a brief practise. Directly the strains from his instrument were heard, the prisoners within earshot would abandon their tasks, and steal quietly into the building to sit around him and listen in silent rapture. When he had finished, a round of spirited applause would burst out, accompanied by urgings and entreaties to give us some more. As a rule we found him willing to oblige, although he apologetically commented upon the adverse conditions prevailing for conducting his recitals, but that was immaterial to us. His music carried us completely away. Even the German soldiers would creep in quietly to become numbered among the appreciative audience. To us a musical instrument was anethema, which is not surprising, bearing in mind what we had to suffer from the ambitious amateurs, but when we could persuade Godfrey Ludlow to a spell of



practise we were lifted to the Olympian Heights of pleasure.

When the Communal Government came into existence it was decided to establish indoor entertainments upon a solid foundation. There was ample talent in the camp ; the material only required organisation and efficient exploitation. We had already endeavoured to relieve an evening's tedium by a comedy sketch, which had been written and presented by F. F——. I met this comedian in Sennelager Camp, and learned that he and his wife had been on the stage for years. They were arrested while fulfilling a contract in Germany. One day, while languishing in Sennelager, Mrs. F—— paid us a visit. But if there was one thing more than any other against which the authorities resolutely set their face, it was for a woman to be allowed into an internment camp, no matter if the lady were the wife of a prisoner. Mrs. F—— was observed by a soldier, who was not disposed to turn the blind eye, and we were all paraded. Then the estimable commanding officer, before us all, treated the lady to a piece of his mind, heaped insults upon her head, and gave utterance to dismal threats which would be visited upon her should she be caught in the vicinity of the camp again. It made our blood boil to stand by and listen to his harangue. But we were helpless. The tears coursed down F——'s face as he followed the officer's words, and watched the despairing haggard face of his wife, who looked at him pleadingly. But both we and the poor woman had to suffer in silence ; the slightest movement on our part on her behalf would have brought pains and penalties indescribable upon us, while she would have been treated to further indignities.

F——'s attempt to provide us with theatrical fare was laudable. A small stage was rigged up in a room under the Grand Stand. It was merely an apology, seeing that a curtain was impossible, while the properties were of the

most crude description. But we thoroughly enjoyed the entertainment. So when we secured permission to run the camp ourselves we decided to carry out theatrical performances upon an ambitious scale, and upon the latest approved lines. The authorities made no demur so long as they were not called upon to contribute a penny to the cost. Indeed, they charged us £50 for the right to use the hall beneath the Grand Stand, which we turned into a theatre, utilised for orchestral and vocal concerts, and on Sundays transformed into an Established Church.

We built a first-class stage, replete with every accessory, even to the plush drop-curtain. We bought the material from a Berlin house and made it up ourselves. Stage carpenters were enrolled, as well as scene painters. Fortunately we had ample skill in this last-named field, there being several artists in the camp. I doubt whether some of the drop scenes could be equalled for beauty in any modern theatre in any country. One or two were magnificent works of art. One in particular aroused widespread comment. It represented months of constant patient labour on the part of the artist, who stuck to his big canvas from early morning to late at night. It was essentially a labour of love with him. He told me that it was the only means whereby he could turn his thoughts from home. His one regret, doubtless, will be the necessity to leave this work behind him when he is released, but he will have the satisfaction of knowing that he played a prominent part in contributing to the pleasurable relaxation of the minds of thousands of prisoners during the dark days of their internment at Ruhleben.

The scenery was also prepared upon a similar elaborate scale. Those artists who did not participate in the stagecraft preparations, performed invaluable work in designing costumes, posters, and announcements. The two last-named were likewise striking works of art, and, undoubtedly

in the future, will become highly prized and valuable among collectors.

A stock company was established, and the advertisement calling for histrionic talent to assist in the great enterprise provoked a striking burst of activity. Hundreds of prisoners suddenly realised that they had been wasting their time, and that they were Irvings, Keans, and Macreadys to the manner born. They rolled up *en masse*, and, to create the desired favourable impression, did not hesitate to become Thespians in appearance if not in ability. The purloins of the Ruhleben theatre in the early days recalled Poverty Corner in the hey-day of its vogue. Many prisoners, who had scarcely ever seen the inside of a theatre before, solemnly blossomed out in true Bohemian manner, thereby incidentally setting a new fashion for the camp. The hair was set down at the accepted angle and style, the seedy hat was sported at the regulation tilt, big ties were seen everywhere—indeed, one might have been pardoned had he concluded, upon striking Ruhleben at that time, that the Germans had rounded up not every Britisher within the Teuton Empire, but every actor under the sun, and had flung them into a common fold.

The ostensible histrionic fraternity which suddenly overwhelmed us, regarded their position with all seriousness, and were impervious to the jokes and gibes which their appearance created. Personally, I think the great majority were histrionic in only one respect—chronic impecuniosity. But there it was. Fashion in Ruhleben decreed that you either had to be or to look like an actor, or to be considered an outsider, a was-ser, or anything else indicative of a past and forgotten age.

A lean-to shed was built—we as usual defraying the cost of the materials and the labour in its construction—for the conduct of rehearsals. This building grew with great rapidity, and underwent extensive enlargement to receive the scene painters and the stage properties. Meantime,



dramatists grew busy preparing the initial plays, and in this connection also, noteworthy talent was revealed. Specially prepared works were supplemented by performances of popular favourites of the homeland, the necessary permission to render which, when we made an appeal, was always granted by the owners of the copyright or dramatic rights. Drama, comedy, sketch, musical comedy and comic opera were given in turn, so that our play-bill of fare was arranged to meet all possible tastes.

The bill was changed twice a week. The prices for the seats were nominal, the house being sixpence and one shilling respectively, with a few reserved seats at higher prices. The performances started about 6.30 p.m. and concluded about 8.15, the necessity to comply with the regulations, which ordained that we should be in our barracks by 8.30, being responsible for this apparently early termination of the performance. On one or two occasions, during the regime of Baron von Taube, we were extended a little consideration, which was appreciated, the performance being permitted to close at a later hour, but these departures from the general time-table were only reluctantly permitted. From the very first the theatre proved a striking success, and has consistently proved to be more than self-supporting. A certain percentage of the revenue was devoted to the acquisition of new and additional properties and the extension of the wardrobe, while contributions were made from the theatre treasury towards the purchase of food-stuffs, which enabled our colleagues who were not flush of pocket to buy little dainties and luxuries at a figure below the ruling prices.

While the initial efforts in regard to music did not prove successful or permanent, it was not long before the masters of craft contrived to get together a small band of accomplished instrumentalists. Then the orchestra developed promisingly and rapidly, until it reached a strength of twenty-six performers. Once the orchestra became





SOME MEMBERS OF THE RUHLEBEN MADRIGAL SOCIETY.



recognised and organised, another and special lean-to building was built out of the camp funds, to offer facilities for practice. As a matter of fact, the concerts—instrumental and vocal—vied with the theatre in popularity. Ambitious works, classic and modern, of every description were rendered, and upon notable occasions the Governor, accompanied by his wife and a few privileged friends from Berlin, honoured us with their patronage. The visitors, it must be admitted, were unstinting in their praise of our achievements in this direction. On more than one occasion they candidly confessed that we had treated them to an evening's enjoyment which could not have been eclipsed in any German centre of music. The organisation of the orchestra served to bring forward considerable excellent material in the form of vocalists, which contributed highly to the pleasure of the entertainments.

While the orchestra confined its operations essentially to indoor concerts, during the brief summer season, when the weather was insufferably hot, *al fresco* promenade concerts were held. This was a diversion which we hugely enjoyed, inasmuch as it reminded us vividly of home. The stretch before the Grand Stand constituted the promenade, where we strolled, listening to the band, or reclined upon the grass or in chairs, according to our mood. Many delightful evenings were whiled away in this manner, and I am not overstepping the bounds when I say that, at such times, some of the more hardened among us were so transported as to forget that we were only prisoners penned up within a German internment camp.

In our determination to preserve the associations with home at all hazards, notwithstanding the depressing conditions, we initiated a local counterpart of another tradition inseparable from the London season. We celebrated our own Royal Academy exhibition. There was plenty of talent in the camp to sustain this movement, and the exhibition proved a striking success. Many of the canvases displayed

at Ruhleben would have compared very favourably with many I have seen on the line in Burlington House. In addition there were many other notable manifestations of skill, artistry, and craftsmanship. Some of the prisoners had passed their idle hours in wood-carving with a pen-knife and other simple kindred tools. One of the negroes had ferreted out some odd pieces of granite which he had laboriously fashioned into knick-knacks of various descriptions, and had imparted a high polish thereto. He must have spent many hours upon his work, but these *chef d'œuvres* aroused considerable and favourable comment. My contribution to the exhibition was somewhat novel. Some years ago I had amused myself by engraving various devices upon an empty chicken's egg. When I found time dragging somewhat in Ruhleben I amused myself in a revival of this craft by preparing an egg emblazoned with the arms of Ruhleben and a suitable inscription. When one bears in mind the extreme fragility of a hen's egg, the peculiar composition of the shell, and its infinitesimal thickness, one perhaps may gather some idea of the labour as well as delicacy of touch, and patience involved in carrying out work of this character. Still, it contributed in a measure to the attractions of the Academy, inasmuch as it was a novelty. In fact, after the exhibition I used it as a magnet in the window of the shop I established within the camp, where it never failed to draw and to arouse considerable interest, even among the German officers, to whom it was something distinctly new and out of the common.

We considered our ring of indoor amusements completed when at last we were able to open the picture palace. It proved a positive attraction, especially among the poorer members of the camp, doubtless owing to the nominal charge for admission, which was one penny. Our one trouble in this direction was with the films. We had to hire these from Berlin. For the most part they were execrable in character,



plot, and technique, while the circumstance that they were terribly worn by the time we received them did not add to their fascination. But good humouredly we tolerated them, pitying the Germans for lagging so far behind the other nations of the world in this phase of industry.

All things considered, it must be admitted that the internment camp was well supplied in point of indoor amusements. There was always something on, which served to while away the tedium of the evenings, especially during the winter, and which did much towards the limited gaiety of the prisoners.

## CHAPTER XII.

### BIDS FOR FREEDOM.

PEOPLE at home, when they read and ponder over the congested internment camp at Ruhleben, may wonder why, under the circumstances, frequent attempts are not made to escape. Now and again we hear of a venture in this direction, while from time to time a prisoner, daring and enterprising, straggles home, having bidden an unofficial adieu to the Teutons.

But there were several factors which contributed against bids for freedom upon an extensive scale. In the first place there was scarcely a prisoner, who, after transference to this centre, did not vigorously maintain that release was merely a question of days. I, myself, despite what I had endured, and the frequent disappointments I had suffered while languishing in Wesel, Sennelager, and Klingelputz, fell a victim to this optimism, which, I must admit, was totally unwarranted. Indeed, I grew rash. I even made a bet with a fellow prisoner to the tune of 2.50 marks—half a crown—that we would all be released before Christmas Day, 1914! I shall never forget the expiration of the time limit. I made my way to the barrack housing the gentleman with whom I had made the wager to discharge my debt of honour. It left me without a cent in my pocket.

Another, and fatal circumstance which reacted against any outburst of energy and ingenuity in this direction was

that few prisoners—exclusive of those resident in the country—were conversant with the language, and it was a long pull from Spandau to the German western frontier. Subsistence *en route* was likely to present many forbidding obstacles, so quiet reflection generally sufficed to satisfy a daring mind that the risk was scarcely worth the candle. Of a certainty, re-capture would be attended by salutary punishment of some devilish description which only a perverted Teuton mind could evolve.

Spies abounded everywhere, while we also had to bear in mind that every Hun's hand was against the British. Consequently, we were not likely to encounter many friendly disposed Germans while making surreptitious way to the frontier. A prisoner in flight could scarcely hope to escape the inevitable challenge, which sooner or later would be flung at him during his difficult journey to the border. Demand for the "pass" which could not be vouchsafed would lead to complete undoing. Even if one retained one's presence of mind, and, upon being questioned, endeavoured to pass off as "An American," one could scarcely hope that such bluff would prove successful, since our American colleagues roaming the country had to produce the indispensable paper or some other irrefutable evidence of nationality.

Accordingly, during the first three months of our incarceration no attempt at escape was recorded. During this period, however, one or two of the more devil-may-care, who from bitter experience in other camps had learned to appraise the Germans, their promises and veiled remarks of hope at their true value, kept their eyes and ears open, and acquainted themselves with the lie of the land, in case an opportunity to embrace liberty suddenly should become manifest.

As time wore on, and less and less was heard of the pending exchange of prisoners, those who were willing to take any risk so long as they could get away from this

accursed spot, commenced to mature their plans in grim earnest. I may say that "How to bolt" and "When to bolt" constituted a favourite theme for discussion in the privacy, such as it was, of our living quarters. Hundreds talked glibly and evolved daring schemes, but very few of them materialised. As a rule the man thought better of his decision when the momentous opportunity arrived. Nevertheless, rumours concerning successful bids for freedom were bandied to and fro without cessation. The moment one wild cat story was laid by the heels another started off on its round. It was easy to talk, but quite a different proposition to put this, that, or some other plan into execution. Yet rumour and "hot-air" talk keyed us up: maintained a pitch of excitement which it is difficult to describe.

One day a shot was heard. It came from the Wachter, or guard-room. It threw the whole population of the camp into a frenzy of the wildest description. Prisoners trooped in their hundreds to the building in question, which, within a few minutes, was surrounded by a bubbling, seething excited crowd, all talking at once and seizing upon the slightest reason for the shot. "A prisoner's got away! Hooray! Good luck to him!"—"A man has killed a soldier. The guard saw him trying to cut loose, attempted to arrest him, but the prisoner grabbed the rifle and shot its owner, and was now skeltering towards England"—"A prisoner has been shot in flight!" These, and a hundred other plausible stories in a similar strain were hurled to and fro, to be accompanied by cheers or groans according as to whether the "facts" were in favour of the prisoner or the guard.

When the commotion had subsided somewhat the true explanation for the report trickled through the crowd, and it had nothing to do with an escape! The guard had been paraded as usual outside the building, and had been put through its invariable rifle paces. One of the soldiers,



a Landsturner, who evidently had forgotten all he ever had learned about his arm, had blundered while unloading, his rifle had gone off, and the bullet had harmlessly buried itself in the roof of the guard-house. The moment the truth became known, the crowd, bitterly disappointed, melted away as rapidly as snow beneath the rays of the spring sun, to strive to create some other diverting story while pursuing the normal occupations of the camp. But the incident serves to indicate how pent-up was our excitement : one and all were suffering from nerves sharpened to a razor-blade keenness.

Nevertheless, a good deal could be related concerning attempted escapes, the preparation of elaborate plans, efforts which were actually made but abandoned, the prisoners securing re-admission to the camp without the authorities having detected their absence, and other details pertaining to this subject, but the moment is inopportune. Such would only render the lot of those still languishing in Ruhleben still harder, and matters have already ascended to a sufficiently terrible pitch of misery and privation without adding further fuel to the flames of Teuton oppression.

We always knew when a bold bid for freedom had been made by one of our colleagues. We were called to general parade at 6.0 a.m. The summons was peremptory : it had to be answered at once. We were not given time to dress. We had to jump up out of our sleep and turn out as we were. Some succeeded in snatching an overcoat and donning it over their pyjamas, while others hustled out, struggling with their nether garments and without coat or hat. When the weather was cold it was a fearful ordeal, but there was not a man among us who did not wish the fugitive every success, so that we gladly shouldered all personal discomforts on his behalf. We knew very well that every minute we could give him was invaluable, so we did not hesitate to delay and hamper the authorities

in their efforts to count us. Either the total was deficient or in excess of the official roll. It was our own cussedness in this connection which contributed to our personal sufferings, but we were determined to give our fleeing comrade every chance, and so, making light of the raw penetrating cold, laughed gaily as we shivered.

Escape was not without its tragical side. One Russian prisoner, a mere stripling, fell a victim to the irksomeness of restraint and confinement. His brain gave way. In his delirium he endeavoured to escape. His flight was detected by the guard, who uttered the challenge. Apparently the unhappy youth's mind was so unhinged as to prevent his realising the purport of the ominous hail. Crack went the rifle. The body of the young fellow, stiff and cold, was brought into the camp the next morning. The guard had undoubtedly taken deliberate aim, instead of being contented to bring the fugitive to earth by winging him. We described it as cold-blooded murder, as undoubtedly it was.

The very circumstance that we knew but little of the system of guarding the camp from without re-acted against the most skilful efforts to break bounds. We discreetly sounded our guards when we became more friendly with them, kept our ears open, and never allowed the slightest detail to escape our eyes. We learned a good deal of distinctive value, as well as the disconcerting intelligence that the protective system was uncannily elaborate. The soldiers were also exasperatingly vigilant and, being nervy, were perfectly ready to shoot on sight.

The earliest breaks away were generally made on the spur of the moment, and without any definite plan having been elaborated in anticipation. As a matter of fact the manner in which the prisoners discussed their ideas revealed their futility. A favourite scheme—in talk only—was to tramp through the country, to gain the North Sea coast, and then to essay to make home by whatever means of

marine conveyance came to hand, from a log of wood to a Dutch steamship. Some of the prisoners talked as airy of crossing the North Sea as of swimming the Serpentine. Fortunately few, if any, of these aspirants to liberty ever endeavoured to put their heroic proposals into operation. It is safe to assert that only a very small minority would ever have reached their goal had they done so.

In contemplating escape one was compelled to think hard and long. Not only was it absolutely necessary to keep one's wits at concert pitch, and to be wonderfully resourceful, but everything down to the utmost detail had to be completed in advance. German system, as expressed by mounting watch and ward, was dead against us. Every night about 9.30 a barrack inspection was zealously performed. The guard entered to examine and count the inmates. If the total tallied with his official responsibility it was acknowledged by a guttural "gute nacht." If it were in error there was a hub-hub until the roll was decided to be O.K.

Escape in the day-time was hopelessly impossible, although in one instance it came within an ace of proving successful.

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What audacity can do was shown upon two other occasions. When Mr. Geoffrey Pyke came to the conclusion that he would sooner live in England than a German internment camp he did about the last thing a fugitive would be expected to do.

But another effort in this direction terminated disastrously, although in my opinion the fugitives drew suspicion upon themselves from their very termerity.. Two broke loose and turned their eyes and footsteps westwards towards the North Sea. They had some 400 miles to go, and what is more to the point they almost covered them.



They did not hurry nor did they cling to the solitude of the countryside. These two men drove their way as far as Wesel, where their elation at their very success led to their undoing. They thought they might just as well take in the sights of Wesel. Whatever possessed them to follow this action is inscrutable, unless it was complete ignorance of the circumstance that Wesel, being a military area, difficult to enter, and more difficult to leave, every stranger is watched as closely as a cat watches a mouse. They were challenged in the street and then all was up! It was a bitter termination to a daring enterprise, but doubtless the twain, being so close to the frontier, concluded they were virtually safe.

Needless to say, attempt to escape constituted the most heinous offence in the whole penal code concerning Ruhleben, and the punishment was fearfully severe. Upon the parade following an alarm we were treated to a shattering harangue. The officials dinned it into our ears that the runaway either was within an ace of being caught, had been caught, or hinted in vague sinister terms that he had met with the fate which must, so they said, attend all such efforts. They never admitted that a man had got away, and so completely as to be beyond their clutches. They spared no effort to strike terror into our hearts. Yet the threats and warnings exercised just about as much effect upon us as water upon a duck's back. When a man disappeared from our midst, and the days passed without recording his return, as the result of re-capture, the authorities cunningly wished us to believe, from artful innuendo, that he had been shot or had encountered a worse fate—solitary confinement. We were urged to take the lesson well to heart. Our captors pooh-hoohed the idea of a man ever succeeding in getting out of Germany, even if he broke the shackles of internment camp confinement.

Although rumour always soon got busy to the effect that the fugitive had regained the homeland we were



never able to be positive upon this point until, at last, we hit upon our own scheme of conveying definite intelligence of success to the camp. When a man bolted we possessed ourselves in patience, listened with tongues in cheek to the fearful warnings and dire growlings of the authorities, until, at last, the expected word coming to hand, we gave vent to our delight. The Germans failed miserably to construe the British spirit accurately. We knew very well that punishment exemplary and severe awaited anyone who attempted to regain his liberty and failed in the effort, but we, animated by the true national spirit, were perfectly content to abide by the results, even if the day went against us.

As we came to appreciate the extremely elaborate arrangements observed to keep us within the four walls of Ruhleben, we realised the necessity to resort to extreme subterfuge, skill, and resource to fulfil our ambitions. It was about the middle of 1915 when the possibility of breaking loose first occupied our earnest attention.

The more daring members of the community were accustomed to discuss escape projects, and to draw up certain unwritten laws bearing upon the subject, which one and all agreed to observe. I took an active part in these transactions, and recall that one of the most keenly discussed topics was as to whether winter or summer time constituted the most advantageous season in which to make the bid for home. The pros and cons were threshed out very thoroughly. Those in support of the winter theory argued that the shortness of the days and the long hours of darkness would be extremely favourable. Obviously the majority of runaways, from their inability to speak the language, would have to haunt the by-ways and trust very much to luck. Consequently, it was averred, the greater length of the night during this period of the year must redound to their advantage. But against the Ally of Darkness was pitted the extreme

cold of the winter season and the openness of the country, with the trees and undergrowth bare of leaves to offer a screen, and imperfect shelter against prying eyes.

The supporters of the summer theory then advanced their recommendations. They emphasised the advantages which the cornfields would offer for hiding, the density of the foliage of the woods and hedges, the ease with which one would be able to sleep in the open during the day, and the comfort of travelling at night with less fatigue, since the sun would not be able to exert its adverse influence. Lastly, and this was the most influential factor, the shortness of the nights notwithstanding, one would be able to subsist longer without food during the summer than in the winter, and would be able to sustain one's-self upon far shorter commons. Accordingly, the summer was voted unanimously to be the more advantageous season in which to shoulder these desperate undertakings. It will be seen that the whole subject was threshed out thoroughly upon businesslike lines, and, needless to say, the meetings of this little Society were keenly attended.

Many other rules were laid down. For instance, if two prisoners were to break loose simultaneously, they were to keep company if they could, but each was to act in accordance with the first law—self-preservation. That is to say, if one met with an accident which incapacitated him, or he was wounded by a shot from a sentry's rifle, his comrade was not to stop to render him assistance. Obviously a fugitive would be unable to go far with another on his back, or with one who could only move with extreme difficulty. The survivor was to push on for all he was worth; the lame duck would not dwell upon his abandonment, nor, disappointed at his adverse turn of luck, move a hand or utter a word to bring about the recapture of his colleague, or convey anything to the authorities to lead

them to discover the identity of the runaway. The officials had their routine in such cases, and it was up to them to pursue them.

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I may say that I had several escape strings to my bow, but, from the extreme gravity of the charge overhanging my head, namely, of being a spy in the pay of the British Government, from which I have never been acquitted, I had to move warily, and without conveying the slightest hint, even to my closest friends.

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At the last minute I was galled to discover an insuperable flaw in my designs. Consequently I reluctantly gave up the idea as hopeless, and decided to possess my mind in patience until I was able to put my bolder and more complete scheme into execution, since I knew it could not possibly fail unless Fortune proved inordinately unkind. It was merely a question of time.

The arrangements for protecting the exterior of the camp were extensive. I committed everything so thoroughly to memory as to induce me to believe that I could have made my way out, and through the surrounding country, blindfolded. I recognised the utter futility of trying to get away unless one had completed the most detailed arrangements, and was able to keep one's head and wits ready for any emergency.

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Although many attempts to get out undoubtedly were made, and proved abortive at the last minute, but little information concerning them leaked out. Naturally the participants maintained a wise silence upon the matter.



Although the Germans were free to express their threats of the severe punishment which would be dealt out to offenders against the escape ordinance, it must not be thought that their mutterings were empty. That is not the German way, as we had occasion to learn.

One unfortunate runaway was caught. He was at once condemned to solitary confinement. We had almost forgotten all about this unlucky comrade, when we received a sudden shock. We were proceeding one morning to the kitchen to fetch our matutinal meal. While marching our attention was attracted by a lonely individual standing in a prominent position. It was the figure of a man, or rather, of what should have been a man. His face had a haunting pallor, something reminiscent of faded parchment, his eyes were listless, and he appeared to have scarcely strength to stand. The pathetic spectacle he presented will never be forgotten.

Who was this unlucky man? We speedily ascertained. It was the British prisoner who had striven to escape from the internment camp and had been caught in the operation. He had been brought from his solitude in a tiny masonry and steel-bound, dimly-lighted room, as silent as the grave, to be paraded before his compatriots as the awful example. The evils of solitary confinement had left their grim traces as we could all see for ourselves, and we learned that similar punishment would be relentlessly dealt out to all others who essayed to repeat his offence. I felt deeply sorry for the unfortunate fellow, since I had tasted the bitter dregs of solitary confinement in Wesel prison.\* After this nauseating exhibition the man was escorted back to his living hell, where he was to remain until the end of the war.

Again the Germans, in their parade of the awful example, committed a grave error. If they had hoped to intimidate

\*" Sixteen Months in Four German Prisons," pp. 44-59.



and to dissuade the most recalcitrant among us from making a bid for liberty, they were doomed to grievous disappointment. It exercised the diametrically opposite effect. Conversation about the incident merely infused the more devil-may-care with greater determination to seek hospitality elsewhere than at Ruhleben.

The parade of the Britisher, whose only crime was that he had made a bold bid for Liberty and his Homeland, and had failed, was to swell the ranks of those pledged to one definite object—Freedom! Freedom!! No matter how, but Freedom!

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE SPLIT IN THE CAMP.

I HAVE already described how the German Government, in the prosecution of its internment campaign, rounded up resident and commercial, travelling and touring Britishers indiscriminately. Unfortunately, as a result of this display of Teutonic thoroughness, the holiday-makers found themselves thrown among strange bedfellows. SOME of the residential and commercial element, from prolonged contact with the country and the Teutonic environment, had suffered a strange and almost incredible transformation. They were supposed to be compatriots, but for the most part they really have become a race of Britishers apart. They are Germans in everything but birth and possibly name. Their faces are unmistakeably Teutonic, as a result of the assiduous cultivation and practise of native manners and customs, while their habits, temperaments, and dress, from environment, are essentially those of the Hun. The very circumstance that some of these residential prisoners clung tenaciously to their assumed nationality only served to throw their loyal colleagues into stronger relief.

This quasi-British section rendered the lives of those of us who were out-and-out loyalists well nigh unbearable. True, in the aggregate, they numbered only from 300 to 400 strong, but this ten per cent. leavening was more than we could tolerate. They were avowedly sympathetic to

the German cause and everything pertaining thereto, and openly antagonistic to the British sentiment. This fact galled us to the quick. It demanded a pretty strong manifestation of British self-control for the loyalist faction to stand by while some of these curs cheered, and otherwise gave full rein to their jubilation upon receiving the news of the sinking of the "Lusitania" and other Hun atrocities. Is it surprising that our fingers itched to grab them one and all by the throats and to choke their treacherous lives out of them?

To exasperate us still further they bestowed German house-names upon the doors of the horse-boxes in which they resided, conversed in German, sang in German, sedulously observed all German fête days and celebrations in the accepted German spirit—in short, blossomed into a live German colony in the heart of a big crowd of staunch Britishers, and spared no effort to flaunt and to flout the flag which should have been their own. I am not exceeding the mark when I say that never a British word was heard to fall from their lips, except in terms of opprobrium, or when they were compelled to resort to their mother tongue to respond to a fellow prisoner who was ignorant of the hated language. Indeed, they had become so thoroughly Germanised as to be able, in many cases, to speak only in murdered English, with the grating twang of the Hun.

Of course, to us, the reason for this exuberant parade of German sympathy in our very midst was only too obvious. They were striving might and main to curry favour with the authorities, cherishing the fond hope that by such action they would either be granted unfettered freedom within a very brief period, or at least be released on "pass," so as to be free to resume their commercial and professional occupations. We had the full measure of these backboneless creatures, but so had the authorities. The officials detested the British to a degree which defies description,

but, if anything, they hated those who were undoubtedly British, but who endeavoured to masquerade as Germans, still more bitterly.

To make matters worse the authorities did not pen up these despicable hounds as they should have done, and thus have given them the fullest rein to air their views to each other, but dotted them promiscuously throughout the camp. Still, emulating the birds of a feather, these cravens invariably congregated to indulge in animated conversation in the vernacular, and to discuss the latest tit-bits of intelligence which trickled into the camp. But, upon the approach of a true-blooded Britisher, conversation was discreetly dropped and comment stifled.

Rumour had it that the authorities distributed these snivelling curs among the barracks from malice aforethought. We maintained that they were planted among us to listen to our trend of conversation, to spy upon our actions, and to act as secret couriers of intelligence to the officials. How far this is correct I do not know, but I can vouch for the statement that these peripatetic dastards considered no task too dirty to be handled, so long as it was likely to redound to their advantage. If a man in a loft or box uttered a comment adverse to Germania it was surprising how speedily the officials gleaned knowledge of the circumstance, while indiscreet actions, conducted in apparent privacy, also reached the notice of those in power with equally amazing celerity.

Consequently, we had no alternative but to regard these pseudo-Britishers with extreme suspicion. We left no stone unturned to indicate that their room was preferred to their company, because we considered them merely as spies, but the renegade Britisher is not easily cast aside. His hide is too tough to be impressed by gross snubbing, while intimidation proved equally ineffective. Their presence was detested, and was productive of endless unpleasantness. They certainly acted after the manner



of the recognised *agent provocateur*. With apparent indifference they would commence a discussion to lure the more hot-headed and outspoken among us into participation. The theme would be brought round very discreetly to the danger spot, when the renegades would lapse into silence. But their ears were wonderful microphones, their brains astonishingly delicate dictaphones, and their eyes as searchingly recording as a cinematograph film. Every word we uttered, every action we committed, which was possible of construction or distortion into an offence against authority, was subsequently reproduced for the benefit of the officials.

During one of these discussions the name of the German Emperor happened to be mentioned. One of the more highly-strung, fretful loyalist auditors present, with more emphasis than politeness, broke in savagely :

“To hell with the Kaiser !”

A few minutes later this outspoken resident of Barrack I. was hauled before the officials on the grave crime of *lese majeste*. He was cross-examined closely, and while undergoing this ordeal his wandering eyes lighted upon the traitors whom he recalled as having been present when he unceremoniously consigned His Imperial Teutonic Majesty to the home of Old Nick. The prisoner's eyes flashed, he ground his teeth, clenched his fist, and gave a look which would have caused even a strong man to hesitate lest he committed a *faux pas*, which was certain to be rewarded sooner or later with a manifestation of revenge.

But the tale-telling humbug was not abashed. He vehemently assured the officials that he had heard the Britisher say “To hell with the Kaiser !” The rendition of the words with the peculiar German pronunciation and accent, which was very marked, only served to infuriate still more the man who had been arraigned.

The charge being declared proven, the man was promptly consigned to the Stadtvoegei—gaol—to suffer three weeks’

imprisonment for having spoken so disrespectfully of the august monarch of the Vaterland. Directly the sympathisers congregated outside learned the result of the interview with authority and the sentence, mutterings savage and ominous were heard. The crowd did not hesitate to voice its intentions towards the renegade.

The craven humbug, now thoroughly apprehensive of his future, since the threats admitted of no misunderstanding, resought the authorities, pleading for protection. He translated the words of fearful import he had heard in undisguised terror.

Turning to the delinquent bound for the cells, the officials gravely warned him that if the man who had acted as informer were attacked, threatened, or subjected to the slightest molestation by any prisoner, most salutary punishment would be meted out to the offender.

I certainly believe that the exasperated prisoner, upon his release, decided to leave no stone unturned in his flaming resolve to exact reparation for the sentence he had suffered. He prowled round the camp, searching for the scalp upon which he had set his mind, harrying the man from pillar to post. The miserable skunk was terrified out of his life. The relentless manner in which he was dogged preyed upon his nerves. In his own mind he was positive that Nemesis was at his heels, but seeking out the authorities he persuaded them to circulate another and more peremptory warning throughout the camp. We on our part, realising the gravity of the situation, spared no effort to induce our comrade to desist from wreaking any revenge, emphasising the fact that if he persisted the future of the camp as a whole would be seriously jeopardised. He accepted this view, and contented himself thenceforward to striking the fear of God into that craven humbug's soul, by grinding his teeth, grimacing fearfully, and fidgetting with his fist, whenever he came face to face with him, but studiously refraining from uttering a compromising word, or making

any action which might have been construed as infringing the regulation. After all, I think our comrade got the best of the bargain, because the terrified courier of intelligence—or spy, as we dubbed him—went about like a whipped hound.

I, myself, have every cause to remember the treachery of these miserable wretches. We had been paraded and commanded to shed the straw from the sacks forming our mattresses. We learned, in a roundabout way, that the straw was to be sent to the mills to be ground up as a constituent for our war-bread. After we had been deprived of this material, we were escorted to an open pile of wooden shavings with which we were ordered to charge our sacks. Then ensued a wild scramble. Those first at the heap secured the most inviting shavings, but in the mad, bloodless, good-natured struggle which ensued to get supplies, much of the material became sadly soiled from dirty boots.

But conceive our dismay when we discovered the shavings to be in a deplorable wet condition. Not merely damp, but so reeking, that the water could be wrung out of them. This was a pretty state of affairs. To attempt to woo sleep upon such a couch was to invite rheumatism and a host of other fearful maladies. There was an animated outburst of indignant conversation, the upshot of which, so far as the more careful of us was concerned was, the determination to observe what precautionary measures were in our power. We emptied the contents of the sacks upon the ground, in the hope that the friendly rays of the sun would exercise the desired drying effect, turning over the material from time to time as if it were new-mown hay lying in the field.

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It was not long before every prisoner entertaining German sympathies became familiar to one and all, and from their



manifestation of alliance with the German cause we promptly dubbed them "Pro-Germans," abbreviated colloquially to "P.-G.'s." It was impossible to hurl a worse epithet than "P.-G." at a man. Among us it was the last word in opprobrium and invective. If the hated letters were flung out by a man in the heat of temper, and the epithet were quite undeserved, then one might safely anticipate the fur to fly within a few moments.

Ultimately, either for the reason that the authorities had gathered all the information they desired through the instrumentality of these "P.-G.'s," or because they feared that the hatred between the two factions would terminate in rioting, drastic action was taken. All the prisoners were summoned to parade. We received the command with characteristic indifference. By this time we had become inured to these expressions of German officialism. We steadfastly believed that we should experience a repetition of the usual routine rigmarole concerning the discovery of "Prisoners who were married," "Prisoners who have German interests," and such like to "stand forward." These parades appeared to afford the authorities a certain degree of pleasure and satisfaction, and we humoured them.

Having fallen in, the officer strutted forward, and bel-  
lowed :

"All those having German sympathies stand out !"

The majority of the prisoners, through taking but little concern in the proceedings, and certainly failing to regard them with attention, misunderstood the word *sympathies* for *interests*. The latter was invariably asked upon these occasions. Consequently a large number of the men stepped forward. We, who had heard aright, could scarcely believe our eyes. We had expected the avowed "P.-G.'s" to answer the summons with alacrity, but here were many men among them whose loyalty we considered to be above suspicion ! We gave vent to a pronounced hissing beneath our breath, which in turn took the mistaken



loyalists by surprise. Looking round at us, and observing our glowering looks, they saw they had committed an error. Forthwith one of their number advanced and requested the officer to repeat his order. He did so. Instantly our comrades, in whose loyalty we had believed, stepped back into our ranks, at which there was great relief and suppressed cheering, although they were unmercifully badgered, and urged to "keep their ears open in future," inasmuch as we informed them that the Germans were past masters at springing surprises of "frightfulness."

Our ranks once more solid, we concentrated our suppressed hissing upon the renegades. But they were as happy as hens scratching upon a fresh manure dump. They could scarcely contain themselves for joy. Their unswerving belief in Germanism was about to receive its due reward. They were going to be released; they would be free to return to their wives, homes and families; they would be able to resume business. For what else would the authorities have issued such an order? Fortunately, they were as squareheaded as our masters, as events proved.

They received our hostility with smirks, smiles, and gibes. While the officers were counting their ranks, they turned and gave free expression to their feelings, knowing full well that we could not retaliate. Already many were freely discussing their future intentions. When at last they were given the order to march to the Racecourse to be re-paraded, and to receive further instructions their delight almost burst its bonds. They went off waving their hands to us left behind, laughing and jabbering as volubly as a flock of magpies.

Two days later it was our turn to whoop with delight. We heard that upon reaching the Parade Ground, these amiable "P.-G.'s" received a rude awakening. After being lined up, the officer in command advanced and roared abruptly:

"How many of those present are prepared to join the German Army?"

"The P.-G.'s" were stunned with amazement. This was something for which they had not bargained. Their enthusiasm for the German cause slumped very heavily.

When we caught sight of the array of drooping jaws and long faces meandering about the camp, we laughed loud and long, and twitted the owners mercilessly. It was a comical spectacle; indeed, I do not think I have ever seen its equal. These men had been quite content to reveal their lapse of nationality unblushingly and unashamedly in the hope of gaining freedom, but to join the German Army! Phew! The confines of Ruhleben, with all its shortcomings, miseries and defects, was as Paradise. The very last thing these parasites desired was to shoulder arms. But now it was fight or remain where you are.

Among ourselves we knew that the authorities did not wholly regard these traitors with admiration. They merely used them to gain official ends. Now that there was no further use for them they concluded they might just as well run the risk of being knocked about by British bullets upon the Western Front as by British fists in an internment camp. Whatever may be said against the Teuton, one can rarely malign him for changing his coat. "Once a German, always a German," runs his creed, as we had learned from bitter experience, and, all things considered, I must admit that many of the officers and men admired, inwardly if not outwardly, the loyalist section of the camp who could not be tempted, cajoled, coaxed, or driven into forswearing the Motherland. The actions and words of some of the officers in their handling of the "P.-G.'s" offered us ample confirmation upon this point. Personally, I do not know who regarded the backsliders with the greater contempt—the canny German officials or ourselves.

I do not think the authorities secured many recruits for

the Imperial Army from among the breakaways. At all events, barely a handful apparently stepped forward from the ranks to buy release at such a price.

But that parade was providential to us—it revealed our enemies. They had declared their sympathies openly, for which we were exceedingly grateful. Obviously the feeling against them became more embittered than ever, and future action constituted the one topic of discussion. One and all agreed that the split in the camp had become *un fait accompli*. The line of demarcation betwixt patriot and traitor became strikingly indicated. The drivelling curs were shunned and spurned on every side. The wonder is that open fighting did not occur. I do not understand to this day how we controlled ourselves to such an extent as to keep our hands off them.

The authorities were quick to grasp the true state of affairs reigning in the camp, and wisely concluded that it was preferable to remove the bone of contention than to intervene upon an outbreak of open strife. Accordingly the "P.-G.'s" were again paraded, and lock, stock and barrel were transferred to a distinctive part of the camp, special buildings, including the tea-house, being reserved for housing their precious hides. There they were at liberty to yell "Deutschland über Alles," and "To Wind up the Watch on the Rhine," to their heart's content. They seldom came into conflict with us, and were careful to keep out of our way as much as possible, in which they were decidedly discreet.

But herding these humbugs together was not without its inconvenient disadvantages. Newly-arriving British prisoners were invariably accommodated in the detested quarters of the "P.-G.'s." Whenever a new British face was spotted in the camp, naturally it aroused interest. When the owner approached a loyalist to enter into conversation, he was always greeted with, "What barrack are you in?" the custom being to associate a prisoner with



his residence. At first the man, in his ignorance, would retort with the number of the shunned building, or perhaps the Tea House, and would then wonder why he was instantly given the cold shoulder. Many incipient friendships were shattered in this manner, until at last some brilliant newcomer, early discovering the condition of affairs and the unsalubrious reputation clinging to the building in which he was quartered, added to the usual reply to the inevitable interrogation, "*But I am not a 'P.G.'*" This explanation never failed to prove the open sesame to the freedom of Ruhleben, since we knew very well from the statement that the man was accommodated there against his desires and was far from being sympathetic with his colleagues in that quarter.

One may ask why the newly-arriving loyalists did not change their quarters at the first opportunity? Needless to say, many did so, but others agitated in vain. The system was against them. Changing quarters in the camp was discouraged. It would have played havoc with our organisation, and the discontented might have been eternally upon the move, which would have conduced to confusion. A prisoner would petition for permission to move, say, from the Tea House to more congenial quarters, but the Communal authorities would seldom extend permission, not desiring to establish a "moving" precedent. A very powerful reason had to be forthcoming to enable him to change his quarters. However, the matter could generally be adjusted in another way. The residents of a friendly barrack having available accommodation, would extend no objection to a new arrival of loyalist tendencies settling among them. In such instances the problem was solved by the man making a moonlight flit. If this were impossible, he had to grin and bear his burden with the best grace he could muster.

I do not think there were any depths of infamy to which these humbugs were not ready to descend. When the



British Prisoners' Relief Fund was inaugurated, whereby a sum of five shillings—subsequently reduced—was paid through the American Embassy, the "P.-G.'s" were the first to claim it. This fund was really launched to assist necessitous prisoners among us, but there were a very great number of the poorer members of the community, who, though in dire need of the dole, were too proud to accept it. The action savoured too much of charity for their independent instincts. But the "P.-G.'s" had no qualms in this connection. They polled up *en masse*, asked for it, and received it regularly. Among this coterie there were many who were well off, but even they did not hesitate to make application for the weekly payment, and openly chuckled about their success in this direction.

The circumstance that so-called Britishers, who had openly renounced their allegiance to the British cause, were weekly receiving money subscribed in Britain for the relief of the needy Britishers interned in Ruhleben, stuck in our gullets. As we saw them receive the money our gore rose, and we felt more inclined than ever to put them out of harm's way. The subject was discussed time after time, but we could do nothing. Nor could the American Embassy exercise any discretion. The representatives were merely distributing the money, doubtless, in accordance with a carefully prepared list from home, and the authors of which were obviously ignorant of the state of affairs. We might denounce the renegades as Teutons, but the German nation was not prepared to accept them as desirable citizens.

How thoroughly these traitors had assimilated Germanism was only too evident when one visited them "at home." I frequently strolled through their quarters to take stock of what was transpiring. Needless to say, I was far from being a *persona grata*, but there was not one of them of whom I was afraid. They were gluttons with their food, and they gulped it down like the hogs they were.

They did not hesitate to get more than their share if opportunity offered, and were by no means particular as to the means practised to satiate their cravings. Table etiquette was totally foreign to them. I have been in one or two of the restaurants patronised by the lower German classes, and have been impressed by the manners at the table, but they were princes to these humbugs. And their pandering to Teuton officialism was nauseating. Whenever an officer passed, a "P.-G.," no matter what he was doing at the moment, would come briskly to the attention, and click his heels, and his hide was so thick as to be impervious to the glance of withering scorn with which his boot-licking action was received by the officer. We had no use for this tribe of Iscariots. To us they were neither fish, fowl, nor good red herring, and to our wardens, even the private soldier, they were naught but human hyænas.

By some means or other a few of these cravens were able to secure permission to proceed to their German homes to resume their business operations. They seldom participated in any of our recreations, for which we were devoutly thankful. One or two stragglers would sometimes steal in to listen to a concert or to witness a theatrical performance, but they always took good care to shrivel into as obscure a corner as possible. They never entered into our sports, while—it is almost superfluous to say so—no "P.-G." was ever known to attempt to make his escape. He was ready to knuckle down to anything; to submit to any indignity. On one occasion they secured permission to hold a German concert, but so far as I know, it was never repeated, for reasons which it is unnecessary to relate, but which, perhaps, may be surmised.

While we were starved as regards news of the outside world and the progress of the war, we always knew when a suppositious German victory had been achieved. On such occasion the "P.-G.'s" gave expression to a wild maffick. The culmination in this manifestation of jubilation over

German alleged successes came with the sinking of the "Lusitania." One or two of the "P.-G.'s" went almost crazy with delight. They cheered as if bereft. When we learned the cause for this wild mirth, our blood boiled, and the more dauntless among us were within an ace of taking matters into our own hands. Fortunately wiser counsels prevailed, and revenge went unassuaged.

The "P.-G.'s" remained in open hostility to the loyalists until the question of exchanging prisoners came to the forefront, and an avenue to Freedom was opened. Then these treacherous wretches suddenly realised that all was not honey under the German flag, and forthwith displayed undue readiness to seek the protection of the Union Jack. They were in the van among those who filed applications for release, and harassed the authorities at every trick and turn to ensure their prompt selection for exchange. But, as may be supposed, the officials were not unduly hasty in coming to a decision concerning these humbugs, carefully sifting them out, as they did us, to ensure that no men of military age or of prime physical condition were sent home prematurely.

Some succeeded in their petition, and were included among the first batch of British prisoners to be released from Ruhleben. Considering their treachery and their antagonism to everything British while interned, the public at home may possibly wonder how it was they secured preference to the loyalist. But it must be explained that the authorities at home were either ignorant of, or entertained only a slight knowledge concerning the split in the camp. Certainly they were unaware of the names of the miserable individuals swelling the "P.-G." ranks, inasmuch as we could not refer to the subject in our limited correspondence with the homeland. But it riled the loyalist element that such renegades should succeed in being numbered among the favoured in view of their despicable conduct in the camp.



One experience in this connection is worthy of narration. The loyalist element in the camp suddenly became perturbed by the receipt of news from Britain to the effect that one of the "P.-G.'s," one Guidal by name, who had been sent home a month previously, had secured a lucrative and comfortable appointment in a south coast town. One may wonder, perhaps, how such intelligence from Britain penetrated to the camp, but I may say that news from home, especially when it was unpalatable, reached us very quickly. The details were too definite to be dismissed as mere rumour; the precise address at which he might be found became known among us.

Our indignation knew no bounds, more especially when we recalled that this miserable traitor had been the most German among the Pro-Germans, and had been unseemingly vociferous in the cheering which went up from "P.-G." throats upon the sinking of the "Lusitania." By what manner of means he succeeded in being numbered among the lucky ones to be released was more than we could ever understand. Although we were absolutely unable to intervene to secure a redress of this flagrant abuse of patriotism, inasmuch as we were debarred from all mention of such incidents in our correspondence with home, we laid our plans to secure his downfall at the earliest possible moment. A certain number of us met in conclave, and we took a solemn pledge that the first of us to secure release should spare no effort to root him out and denounce him.

As I was the first of this particular coterie to obtain my freedom, this task on behalf of the comrades I had left behind, devolved upon me. I found the information which I brought away with me from the camp ample to achieve my purpose. I commenced investigations, and was nearly floored by my discoveries. The man was not only occupying the position of tutor among British boys, but the most amazing circumstances were that he was on intimate terms with another master in the self-same



educational establishment, who was an out-and-out German, and who was actually then residing in a district which was supposed to be prohibited to aliens. Truly the precept concerning "birds of a feather" was grimly illustrated.

It so happened that while prosecuting my enquiries upon the spot, to wit, in the town of Worthing, I came face to face in the street with the despicable skunk. I eyed him rather narrowly to make certain of my ground, since, after being brushed up and furbished, he appeared somewhat different from the seedy prisoner who had prowled around Ruhleben. But I could see that I had run my man to earth. His returning glance carried recognition. I accosted him, remarking breezily :

"Hullo ! How are you ?"

He looked at me sheepishly, and then, pulling himself together, seemed half-disposed to disclaim all knowledge of me. But he must have realised from my penetrating look that I had him fairly fixed. With assumed wonder he replied, with his characteristic deliberation :

"Oh ! It's Mr. Ma-hone-ey !"

I was not to be disarmed by his feigned surprise and tone of veiled welcome, so pursued inquisitively :

"Oh ! So you do remember me, do you ? What are you doing here ?"

Apparently convinced that I knew a good deal about his current activities, he resorted to a candour which was somewhat disconcerting. He admitted having secured a position as assistant in a school, agreed that he was doing well, was comfortable, and was among friends.

The information my enquiries yielded I handed over to a colleague identified with the British Empire Union. This friend pursued independent enquiries, and these investigations not only corroborated my story up to the hilt, but were graced with further details which were eminently unsatisfactory. It was then decided to make a personal call upon this renegade, and my friend, accompanied by

another loyalist, B——, who had been released from Ruhleben, proceeded to Worthing, to have the matter threshed out there and then. The returned prisoner B—— volunteered to go to offer additional evidence of Guidal's behaviour at Ruhleben, if desired, the ultimate object being to notify the authorities of the presence of this highly dangerous individual in a south coast town.

But their mission proved abortive, although they discovered evidences of collusion between the pro-German and his German associate. Upon arrival at Worthing they found their birds had flown. The two curs had evidently gleaned knowledge that Nemesis was at their heels, had decided it was better to fly than to brave it out, and had sought sanctuary in the spaciousness offered by the city of London, hoping to be lost to sight among its teeming millions. Ample evidence was forthcoming to establish the danger of Guidal being at liberty; his treachery and pro-German activities in Ruhleben alone should prove sufficient to secure his prompt internment in this country, while it is undoubtedly iniquitous that such a miserable cur should have secured his Freedom at the expense of a man who stuck by his Flag through thick and thin, and who had endured to the full the hardships and privations of an internment camp in Germany. But the day of reckoning will come. The patient loyalists still lingering in Ruhleben, cognisant of the dangerous character of these Iscariots, their readiness to change their national coats to suit the occasion, the menace to the community which they constitute, and the high regard they have for their precious hides, so long as personal benefits may be gained, will extract full measure of satisfaction when the opportunity arrives.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### TRADING IN RUHLEBEN.

ALTHOUGH for a few weeks Ruhleben Camp might very aptly have been nick-named, and would have deserved to have been called "The City of Lost Souls," seeing that we all followed an absolutely aimless existence, resorting to twiddling our thumbs and other slender expedients to kill time, it was not long before the business instinct commenced to assert itself. Once the commercial seeds were planted, growth was rapid, the Britisher fully justifying his claims to excelling as a shopkeeper. When trading got into full swing the camp assumed a totally different aspect. It recalled a hive which reposes quiescent and dormant during the hibernating period of winter, but which throbs, bustles, and hums during the summer, the workers putting every available minute of time to productive labour.

In the hey-day of its prosperity Ruhleben was a thriving and prosperous healthy town, possessing many peculiar features, which could not have failed to arrest the earnest attention of the visitor happening within its boundaries for the first time. A host of lucrative and flourishing trades were in full swing, while the rows of shops—"canteens," we called them—imparted a busy town-like appearance to the colony. Bearing in mind that this condition of commercialism was acquired from the most slender materials—it was a most powerful and convincing

illustration of being able to make bricks without straw—it speaks volumes for the ingenuity and initiative of its more go-ahead citizens.

The cradle of Ruhleben commerce was Barrack 6, and, it is scarcely necessary to say, it was the pushing Jew-boy who roused the community to such an outburst of energy. A certain number of these religionists commenced bartering among themselves. The initial transactions were conducted in the primeval manner—the exchange of goods. Ike had an article, say, a razor, which he considered superfluous. Moses was in a similar boat with regard to a brush. Each wanted what the other did not require, so exchange was promptly effected. But the articles available for such a primitive system of trading were few in number, and speedily travelled round the barrack. Bartering was attended with many advantages, but at the same time it possessed shortcomings which were sorely realised. No individual profit or betterment of position could be achieved in this manner. Consequently exchange in kind speedily gave way to the system of buying and selling practised by every civilised nation. Those of the Jewish fraternity who were flush of funds promptly bought anything available for disposal, needless to say at a ludicrous price. They went farther afield and got rid of the accumulated goods in return for lucre, the margin between buying and selling prices, it is almost superfluous to remark, being extremely wide, and distinctly advantageous to the embryonic Whiteley.

The birth of commercialism had to be carried out surreptitiously, but the Jews triumphed over all obstacles. The diversity of articles which could be secured through the Jewish tradesmen was startling. Where they secured the goods passes comprehension. One thing is certain. They evidently evaded officialdom successfully and established trading relations with their co-religionists in Germany. You could get anything you might desire, no matter how



extraordinary, through the Jewish barrack. Articles in universal demand were generally forthcoming immediately, but if anything special was in request, it was generally procurable within a few days.

I was instrumental in emphasising the trading enterprise of the Jewish prisoners to my horse-box companions. To my mind "Lights Out" was sounded at an unearthly early hour. At all events it wearied me to lie on my back in the oppressive darkness, strenuously striving to woo sleep, but in vain. After a night or two the situation grew unbearable, and I informed my companions of my intention to put in an hour or two's work after the sentry had looked us over for the night. I intimated that I was going out to buy some candles. Thereupon one of my colleagues treated me to a burst of good-natured ridicule.

"Get some candles in Ruhleben," he chuckled, "why, you might just as well try to walk home to England! Bet you a bob you don't get one!"

"Right," I retorted, "I'll bet you a bob I do!"

The wager was clinched and I sallied forth on what was put down as a hopeless shopping expedition. I made my way to the Jewish barrack and entered. Not being known to the inmates, who were very clannish, I was regarded with ill-concealed suspicion, and my discreet interrogations were received with a firm emphatic disclaimer of all knowledge concerning a chandler. At last I espied a prisoner with whom I was on fairly intimate terms. I made known my request to him. He looked at me sideways.

"Do you want them for yourself?"

I nodded in assent.

He slipped away in the darkness. He was gone some time and I was almost beginning to think that my shilling was lost when I felt two candles slipped into my hand. I turned. It was my Jewish friend. I chuckled.

"Fourpence each," he ventured.

Clink went the money and I returned to my domicile proudly displaying my "forbidden" lights. I got the best of the deal, since the candles cost me nothing, and left me fourpence to the good. I won the bet.

The first manifestation of open trading was conducted in Barrack 6. A few of the boys decided to improve the shining hour. Such beverages as coffee, tea, and cocoa were a great luxury in the camp in those early days. We could secure no variation of the eternal official acorn substitute for the first-named. But one day two or three of the Jew-boys came round with a steaming bucket of tea which they were prepared to sell at a penny a cup to whoever would buy. This miniature A.B.C. proved a corking success. Those concerned with the enterprise could not begin to meet the demand. The bucket was used for a wide variety of divers purposes, but we never thought of that. The steaming beverage was such a treat as to stifle all thoughts of the last job for which the vessel had been employed previous to its improvisation as an urn. Where the enterprising caterers secured the requisite materials was a mystery. To the camp in those days tea and coffee were as foreign as snow on the Equator.

This initial company proved such an overwhelming success as to arouse the envy of another group of Jewish traders. They had a conclave and decided to operate in opposition. The competition was hailed with delight, since it served to keep prices steady. Both the Ruhleben "A.B.C." and the "Lyons" peripatetic tea-shops drove a thriving business and must have proved overwhelming financial successes to their respective promoters. The two concerns could not meet the demand until they became more ambitious in their operations and launched out upon a more pretentious scale. The walking coffee stalls by this time would doubtless have become huge businesses, but further expansion, indeed, the very existence of the enterprises, was cut short summarily by the initiation

of our system of self-government. But they had a lucrative run while the traffic lasted.

A third catering experiment launched out upon a different scale. It confined its work to the supply of eatables—not in variety or plenty—but so appetisingly as to render the idea financially successful. They brought round small sandwiches, of the cheese variety for the most part, which they cleared out from one penny to threepence each. These sandwiches were somewhat small, and at times of doubtful quality, owing to the fluctuations in the grade of the raw materials, but coming as a distinct relief to the prevailing rations they were heartily demolished by those who had the wherewithal with which to vary the monotony of our food.

The financial successes of the enterprising Jewish fraternity stimulated a youth in one of the other barracks to a commercial outbreak in another direction. He was only about 15 years of age, but he was as keen as a March wind. He had been serving on a ship, probably as cabin boy, or something of that kind, and had been arrested while his vessel was lying in a German port. He observed that one and all of us were becoming dowdy about the feet. So he decided to start off as a shoeblack. He secretly contrived a box in accordance with the prevailing London idea, secured some decrepit brushes, and one or two boxes and bottles of blacking and polish.

His brain wave came as a complete surprise. As we sauntered through the camp one morning we were astonished to see a shoeblack pitched at the corner of one of the barracks. He was inviting one and all, in accepted lusty tones, to have "boots cleaned." Probably for the first time since their incarceration the prisoners were persuaded to give a glance at their footwear, and were forced to acknowledge that they were in dire need of re-furbishing. Few of the appeals proved unavailing. The more donnish of the prisoners realised the opportunity to extract a little



comfort from a pleasing illusion. The shoeblack, with the paraphernalia of his trade ostentatiously displayed, revived memories of London, and the very operation of submitting to a boot-clean served to transport scores in thought to the metropolis once more. Imagination went a very long long way in Ruhleben.

That go-ahead boy picked up money as easily as pebbles can be gathered upon the seashore. Trade was brisk and continuous throughout the day, and his pockets were heavy when he returned back to his barrack in the evening. His charges were distinctly of the "town," while tips rained upon him just as liberally as if he had indeed been back at home and plying this calling. He became as familiar upon his select pitch as a landmark, it being one of the accepted laws of the camp that, if a man were to blossom out and to establish himself upon a certain spot in the public quarters, he was to remain there unmolested so long as he felt disposed to practise. He could not have his pitch jumped. If an envious rival, by being up early, sought to secure it upon the principle of first come first served, he was promptly ejected.

There has always been one aspect of commercial activity in Ruhleben which is probably unique. If a pioneer in any new line struck oil, then it became the craze to emulate his example. This was emphasised for the first time in connection with the boot-cleaning operations. My lord, the youth in question, had not been on his pitch many days when his chuckling over his unexpected streak of luck received a severe set-back. A rival in trade appeared, followed by another, then another, and another. They came in such rapid succession and numbers as to convey the impression that boot-cleaning in Ruhleben was the short cut to affluence. The manner in which they vied for patronage was amusing and instructive. The pioneer was content with a humble box, but some of those who came later sought wealth rapidly by doing the work in style. They







laboured long and hard contriving comfortable easy chairs and upholstering them lavishly, that is, taking into consideration the limited materials at their command, the ultimate result being that the shoeblack's stand developed into a replica of the finest display of the American way of doing things in this field.

To take a shoe-shine upon Bond Street became as inseparable from the fashionable doings of Ruhleben as an equestrian spurt in Rotten Row at home. The dude, cigar in mouth, would loll with affected "style" in the chair, idly regarding passers-by, ignoring banter and chaff, while, perhaps, his loft-colleague wrestled with his boots, spats, and the extremities of his nether garments. As may be supposed, submission to this indispensable daily routine from the comfort of a luxurious chair was preferable to the ungraceful and tiring imitation of the stork in connection with the less pretentious box. The chairs had it all their own way, especially with the "Smart Set," although as things proceeded, the typical shoeblack, deprived of his higher class clientele, made more appeal to the less wealthy of the camp. But as the latter regarded the expenditure of their slender income upon victuals as wiser and more beneficial than the gratification of the desire to cut a dash with mirror-like boots, the more humble shoe-blacks fell upon evil days. They struggled bravely for a re-bestowal of patronage by embellishing their boxes with weird attention-compelling designs executed with brass studs, and with bold plates secured from home, setting forth that "Peach Bloom Boot Polish" or "Night and Sparrow's Blacking" was superior to all others. But to no avail, and they gradually vanished from the scene of their labours.

The youth who had been the pioneer in this field of endeavour, was not a whit dismayed by the turn of events. He did not belabour Fortune for her fickleness. He conceived another great idea. He secured possession of many odd pieces of coarse sacking and canvas. He cut up this

material, sewed bags and stuffed them with straw. He made known far and wide that he was ready to supply pillows to all who cared to buy. Seeing that pillows were virtually an unknown appointment to our bed equipment, he once more drove a flourishing trade, more particularly as at that time straw could no more be obtained in the camp than meat, the authorities having carefully gathered every wisp upon which they could place their hands. How and where that boy obtained the straw was more than we could fathom. His first break in the commercial world of Ruhleben had brought home to him the urgent necessity of maintaining a chilling silence concerning his brain-waves and method of transacting his business. He was interrogated ceaselessly concerning his straw supply, but he gave either an evasive answer or dexterously steered the topic into another channel. He was ready to supply goods as advertised and satisfaction as to the source of his materials was outside the bargain. I questioned him one day on the subject but he was tighter than an oyster. He merely cocked his head on one side, gave a knowing wink, inscrutable smile, and jerked his upturned thumbs. It was indeed a case of "Thumbs-up" because he made money at an abnormally rapid rate. He was one of the most energetic and progressive youngsters I have ever seen, and he certainly had got all his fellow prisoners beaten to a frazzle in the qualities of resource and ingenuity in their relationship to trading.

When commercialism as generally understood flagged in the camp as a result of the establishment of communal trading, he still kept things going, although his periods of activity in any one line grew persistently briefer. One of the most remunerative spasms of this description was raffling five mark (five shillings) notes to the crowd. Seeing that as a rule he persuaded from 80 to 100 colleagues to have a go at a penny a time the occupation was highly profitable. He was ready to sell five-mark notes all day so long



as he could rake in from 7s. to 8s. 6d. in pennies on each gamble. The plunge was off when the draw was not likely to exceed five shillings in the aggregate, the exchange of two sixpences for a shilling being sheer waste of time in his opinion. There were very few ventures upon which he embarked out of which he did not clear a handsome return. "Get in and out quickly before the novelty loses its pull" was certainly his commercial motto. The boy was candid. He was out to make money as fast as and how he could. He had a mother at home, and she and her welfare were foremost in his thoughts.

Money was plentiful in Ruhleben Camp. I doubt if there is a town of similar size in any part of the world which could point to so much wealth. But the opportunities for spending it were somewhat severely restricted. One may, perhaps, wonder how such a state of affairs could prevail, but it must be remembered that our ranks were drawn from every strata of society. We had one or two extremely wealthy individuals, a large sprinkling of others who were very well off and connected, while a big proportion were drawn from what might be described as the comfortably situated commercial class. An appreciable percentage of these lucky individuals were in regular receipt of remittances from home, and it was these reserves and streams of currency which suggested, fostered, and developed the trading instinct.

When the camp settled down to Communal Government, a system of controlling the volume of money in circulation was introduced. The Camp authorities rightly concluded that to permit unfettered distribution and possession of money within the prison might exercise a disastrous effect. Accordingly, the Government acted as bankers or Safe Deposit. Prisoners who received remittances from home in excess of a certain sum, deposited them with the authorities, and were permitted to draw regularly upon their accounts, although no weekly withdrawal was supposed

to exceed ten shillings. The imposition of this stipulation concerning the maximum weekly withdrawal ensured the depositor having adequate pocket money to satisfy immediate needs, but it could be exceeded if sufficient reason were forthcoming, say, for instance, on account of the purchase of a suit of clothes, or some other necessary articles of attire or appointment for a domicile, involving a relatively heavy outlay.

This communal banking system was a wise proceeding. It offered complete protection against crime, and similarly removed possible cause of disaffection. Had each man been at liberty to keep his money in his own residence, such possession of wealth would undoubtedly have aroused the cupidity of one or two at the opposite end of the social scale, and robbery would probably have resulted. Moreover, by restraining the spending capacity of the wealthiest members of the community a more harmonious feeling was maintained. Had the poorer prisoners been treated to a display of lavish and reckless expenditure upon the part of the privileged few, groushings and murmurings would have been inevitable. The impecunious would have felt their position much more keenly, and there would have been a tendency among them to grumble at the good fortune of the lucky ones who would have been able to satisfy every passing whim and fancy. This would have become pronounced in the purchase of foodstuffs, inasmuch as the well-off prisoners would have been in the position to have laid in large stocks of food from the mere circumstance that they had the ready with which to take advantage of the market. But by restricting the weekly allowance things were levelled. Credit was unknown in Ruhleben. The rich prisoner had to pay cash like his poorer confrère, and accordingly was unable to purchase beyond the extent of the money in his pocket.

Yet, for some reason or other, many of these wealthier prisoners suffered from prolonged spasms of financial cramp.

This malady, however, in my opinion, was really due to their readiness to keep camp-trading going briskly. They certainly did not believe in hoarding their money, and free increasing currency circulation naturally led to the social betterment of the camp. But their action led to one inevitable result. Money-lending became an established occupation or profession among the astute. So far as Ruhleben was concerned there was no or very little risk. The remittances came regularly to hand and all debts in this connection were immediately discharged.

I, myself, practised money-lending upon a small scale, but not upon the generally accepted lines. I charged no interest. I participated in this system of trading for two distinct reasons. I had set up as an engraver and jeweller, having secured a kiosk to serve as my emporium. This business proved highly profitable, but I was always somewhat apprehensive concerning the safety of my money. By lending it out in small amounts to various prisoners I virtually banked it. Moreover, I discovered money-lending to be an excellent stepping stone to the sale of jewellery. When a prisoner came to redeem his promise to pay, he invariably reciprocated by making a purchase, and thus he kept me going. I also discovered that by developing the clientele to whom loans were made I really established an immediate possible ring for the absorption of any new line of goods I might procure. Thus, for instance, when I secured a consignment of cigarettes, which I had to clear with all speed, lest the authorities swooped down and confiscated them, I had only to go round among my patrons making known the fact that "coffin nails" were to hand. I received a good order from each, and in this, as in other instances, cleared the whole of the doubtful stock within a few minutes, and without going beyond the privileged ring of customers.

When the commercial possibilities within the camp came to be realised, trading developed at a rare pace.



Every prisoner with an ounce of enterprise ventured into some field of activity. Unfortunately, however, the majority failed to stick to their jobs. In a few days the occupation lost its novelty, the promoter of the undertaking permitted his interest to flag, with the result that his business speedily deteriorated. Finally, he would clear out his remaining stock at a ridiculous price, and possibly venture into another branch of commerce which apparently offered greater attractions. In the Camp the axiom "A Nine Day's Wonder" prevailed: the rolling stone had a glorious time. This policy was mainly due to the circumstance that something new and novel was adequate to start a new craze or boom as already mentioned. To-day it would be dealing in clothes: a week hence snobbing and general repair of footwear would become the obsession; to give way in turn to tailoring or some other range of human endeavour. Naturally the severe competition which was encountered in each line of trading once it had caught on, became so fierce and extensive as to render that trade as a whole wildly impossible. The pioneer was the only one to make anything out of the craze as a rule, because he wisely ceased his activities at the appearance of formidable rivalry. Trade booms came and went in bewilderingly rapid succession, but few callings survived. By the time the "rush" had fizzled out more money had been lost than gained.

This cult of the "craze" was demonstrated in various directions, notably in connection with what might be termed the fashions. One morning one of the dons created consternation in the street by his hirsutical appearance. His hair was neatly parted in the centre and carefully plastered down on each side with a glossy finish. Immediately every prisoner hastened back to his barrack to treat his hair in a similar manner. Parting in the centre became the vogue: to abstain from the latest mode was to be ranked as a complete outsider in the camp. Then another leader



of fashion conceived the idea of allowing his beard to grow. Everybody else did likewise. A little later the clean-shaven craze came in, and beards vanished as if by magic. Then the moustache had a run, until the changes were rung on the beard once more with an Imperial. And so it went on. No fashion enjoyed a long vogue, with the exception, perhaps, of the beard, which was found to be an excellent protection to the face during the bitter winter weather encountered at Ruhleben. But such crazes were not without their beneficial features. They stimulated individual enterprise, created trade, and encouraged the circulation of money, which, after all, was the primary consideration of those prisoners who had to keep things going by hook or by crook in the determination to turn over a few honest shillings wherewith to buy the fuel to keep the human engine going.

Individual enterprise in Ruhleben had a grand opportunity and a highly successful run. But it was interrupted summarily. It was not free from its disadvantages. Budding princes of commerce who failed to make good, and who tired of their businesses, sold out at low prices. One or two of the more astute prisoners, trained men of commerce, realising the trend of things, were always ready to acquire languishing concerns possessed of any promise of success if handled systematically and scientifically. Consequently there was the danger of monopolies becoming established, and the dread of any trust operations in Ruhleben became so marked as to bring about a movement which ruled the individual business man, except within certain limitations, impossible, as narrated in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE TRADING BOOM IN RUHLEBEN.

AMONG the many innovations which met with whole-hearted approval upon the coming of the Communal Government was the prohibition of individual trading in necessary articles. The term was wide in its interpretation, comprising foodstuffs, clothing, soft goods in general—in short, anything and everything which was likely to be in widespread demand and which was likely to conduce to the benefit or comfort of the community. It was a demonstration of socialistic trading upon a comprehensive scale, and, all things considered, it must be conceded as having proved a complete success. It ruled out the profiteer; secured control of the supply of necessities which, in turn, contributed to equitable distribution; and, last but not least, ensured prisoners obtaining what articles were urgently required at a reasonable price.

But it was not only the Communal Government which brought about the disappearance of the individual tradesman. The German authorities acquiesced in the proposal, and in fact took adequate steps to see that private trading in necessary articles was suppressed. To venture into such a field was to invite certain disaster and punishment. But the official action was actuated by motives vastly different from those animating the Camp Government. The latter acted merely from the defensive point of view as already narrated: the former lent its powerful co-operation

because it drew  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. commission upon the income derived from trading operations. Naturally, clandestine trading in necessities would have deprived the German authorities of a certain amount of revenue; hence the energy it displayed in suppressing individual enterprise.

Seeing that the demand for necessities was far in excess of supply, and that such a field offered the most attractive possibilities to aspiring Universal Providers, it may be thought that the assumption of trading operations in this connection by the Communal authorities effectively smothered individual initiative. But it was not so. It merely involved ambitious traders becoming more novel and daring in their ideas. They were free to embark upon any venture which did not rank as a necessity. Thus, for instance, I set up as an engraver and jeweller. This was considered by the Government to be a luxury trade, and I was perfectly free to practise it so long as I felt disposed. Another prisoner, an industrious dusky loyalist from some remote corner of Greater Britain, was skilled in marble carving and polishing. He picked up odds and ends of suitable stones in the camp, took them to his barrack, and with crudely fashioned tools, contrived a wide variety of articles to which he imparted a brilliant lustre—he was forced to depend upon hand labour throughout—and which he offered for sale as souvenirs. He was also permitted to ply his craft unmolested.

From the foregoing it will thus be seen that scope was granted to permit the industrious and diligent to prosecute their activities. The communal ordinance certainly did exercise one outstanding beneficial influence. It eliminated the "get-rich-quickly" type of trader, who, even in the internment camp, was alert to exploit his fellow prisoners if the opportunity were presented. But we were not sorry to record his disappearance from the scene.

To recapitulate all the ways and means whereby the shining hour was improved and honest shillings were earned

in Ruhleben Camp would be wearisome. They were so varied. The majority became infected with the money-making bacillus, and no job was considered as too undignified or humble so long as it brought its due reward. In the early days waiting in the queue at the parcels office for a present from home was tedious, distinctly uncomfortable, and exasperating. It became additionally irksome subsequently, if one happened to be established in business, inasmuch as it involved shutting up shop, possibly for several hours. If a prisoner were ill, and unable to leave his bed, he felt the absence of his parcel, which he knew was awaiting his call, with additional keenness, especially if he anticipated the contents included something of which he was in serious need, such as a tin of milk, a little luxury, or nourishing British bread.

One day a prisoner, anxious to earn a few pfennigs by honest labour, suggested that he should be permitted to fetch a sick prisoner's parcel which was awaiting clearance. The man, who was too ill to fetch it himself, gladly accepted the offer and gave his comrade the requisite authority. Up to this time we had been somewhat doubtful as to whether the authorities would hand over a parcel to anyone but its lawful owner, and so the experiment was followed somewhat anxiously. The man had a long wait, but he came back with the parcel, and related that no objections to its vicarious clearance had been raised, the officials accepting the written authority of the consignee as completely relieving them of all responsibility in case of a dispute.

The man who had fulfilled the errand for its grateful owner was rewarded with a "tip," and this reward set him thinking. He offered to serve any other prisoner in a similar capacity, and at a nominal charge. Needless to say his offer met with a ready response. In fact, he made such a good thing out of the job as to induce many other prisoners, similarly placed financially, to emulate his example, the



result being that within a short time we could point to an efficient service of professional parcel clearers.

At that time, seeing that the system of clearing the parcels from the office was not organised, this service proved wonderfully convenient. The men who had assumed this occupation apparently divided the camp into rounds or territories, so as to avoid competition and confusion. They would make the trip to the official notice-board, peruse the list of names for whom parcels had arrived, make a note what had come to hand for those lucky prisoners whom they were accustomed to serve in this capacity, return to the barracks, notify each prisoner therein that a parcel was awaiting claim, and request the necessary written authority to clear it. Armed with this declaration they took their position in the queue, presented themselves at the office window, and secured delivery. After they had made one or two such appearances at the window their faces, as well as the list of prisoners for whom they were acting, became familiar to the officers in charge, and so the parcels were handed over without demur.

Parcel-clearing developed into an important and lucrative occupation—so much so that at last the authorities sought to raise objection to one man clearing a dozen or more parcels upon one appearance at the window. They demurred that it upset their system, though how such could possibly be the case we failed to realise. At all events they merely gave expression to a little murmuring, and then allowed the matter to drop. To suggest that a parcel-collector should appear at the window with his list, clear one consignment, return to the end of the queue until he once more arrived at the window to collect the second consignment, thus making perhaps twelve trips to the end of the queue, and presenting himself at the window as many times as they suggested should be done, even appeared to the somewhat dense authorities as being ridiculous, especially when they finally tumbled to the fact that

clearing twelve parcels at one time very appreciably facilitated and expedited their part of the work.

When the objection was first aired the authorities assumed an unusual line of reasoning. They urged that it was not fair to the other waiting prisoners, but as the latter appreciated the advantages of the system this specious argument fell very flat. Parcel-clearing prevailed until the whole system of distributing the parcels was placed upon a superior and more scientific footing with two windows "A to K," and "L to Z." The introduction of this method did upset the simplicity of collection, since a man might be armed with authority to collect parcels from each window, and in this instance he did have to attach himself to the end of each queue to await his turn. Parcel-clearing then lost its attractions because it took longer to earn the money incidental to the errands, and so the service fell off, although it is still practised upon a less comprehensive scale.

These collectors also served another useful purpose, somewhat reminiscent of one phase of duty incidental to the District Messenger Service of London. I have already referred to the circumstance that the Communal shops announced when certain articles of food were to hand and for sale and how queues formed outside these shops. For instance, butter was in to-day and a certain prisoner was anxious to make a purchase thereof. But he resented the prospect of waiting possibly an hour or two in the biting wind or pelting rain, or perhaps he was more profitably engaged elsewhere. Accordingly he called upon one of the messengers to assume a position in the queue for him. At a later hour the prisoner would present himself and exchange places with his deputy in the line. It was a highly convenient service, was widely appreciated, while the cost was only twopence!

When we were first rounded up and coralled the German Government reduced its expenditure upon culinary articles

to the minimum. We were merely served with a basin. We felt the absence of plates, knives, forks, and other incidentals to the table very keenly. One prisoner remedied this deficiency. By some means or other he secured a large assortment of indispensable utensils—cups and saucers, plates, dishes, and so forth. Apparently they were purchased from a German firm, but we never troubled our heads over the thought of trading with the enemy, inasmuch as we were delighted at the opportunity to secure one or two of the generally accepted amenities pertaining to the table, although the enterprising tradesman's charges were certainly at war level.

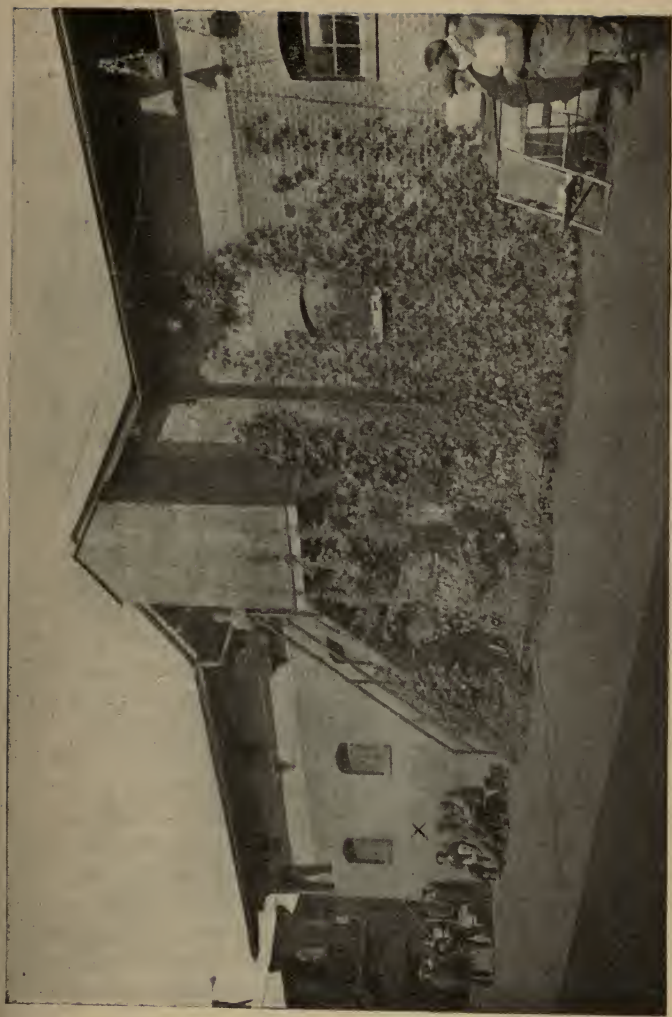
The widespread utilisation of plates and other utensils gave birth to another lucrative calling. This was the creation of a dish-washing service, and I may say, seeing we had to coax fat and grease from the surface of our platters with cold water—hot water was then a luxury, only obtainable from the kitchen—there was not a single man among us who could truthfully confess that he appreciated the task. The appearance of the dish-washing service was hailed with delight, all those who could afford it readily entrusting this necessary duty to someone else. The demand for dish-washers became very pronounced when we commenced to receive food parcels from home, and they plied a thriving business. Their charges were trivial for the service rendered—and they deserved every penny they earned, inasmuch as it was a slight recompense for their diligence and perseverance in securing a small dole of hot water. This was obtained in limited quantities as follows. The heating apparatus attached to each barrack was equipped with an exhaust steam pipe discharging into the outer air through the side wall. The dish-washers used to assemble around the exhausts armed with small basins of cold water which they held in such a manner as to allow the steam to play upon the water, patiently holding the vessel in the one position until the contents had been



warmed sufficiently to enable dish-washing to be prosecuted with a certain degree of facility and celerity. It was an arm-breaking task holding the basin in the essential position, since about ten minutes' exposure to the steam was necessary to take the chill off the water. During winter, when the weather was piercingly cold, there was a hurried rush from the exhausts to the barracks, the dish-washer fearing that his precious liquid would grow ice-cold before he had settled down to his task. Some of these prisoners built up quite an imposing round, and they proceeded from one customer to the other with all possible speed, husbanding their precious supply of cleanser, and hustling to complete the duty before the water resumed its semi-freezing condition.

Residents in the lofts and "streets" of horse-boxes below appointed orderlies to keep the barracks clean and tidy. When we had settled down to our surroundings this appointment was made permanent for so long as the selected individual cared to hold it. His weekly salary was defrayed by the occupants individually and collectively, the general recognised contribution from each occupant being 10 pfennigs—one penny—per week, although some of the more affluent residents gave liberally, thereby making good any deficiency which might have resulted from the inability of the more impecunious members to afford even this humble coin. So far as the horse-boxes were concerned this service was supplemented by "fags." The prisoner was not posted to a single box, but had a regular round or list of patrons. His duties were simple, comprising keeping the apartment clean and tidy, making beds, and performing other small though equally necessary tasks. The cost of this service was shared by the five or six occupants of the residence, the average individual weekly payment being about 5s. When a prisoner was "fagging" to three, four, or half a dozen horse-boxes regularly his aggregate weekly wage was by no means to be despised.





### OUTSIDE BARRACK 5.

Showing the efforts of the prisoners to improve the appearance of their dismal quarters.  
The Author is indicated with a cross.



The London barman, to whom I have previously referred, and who had been arrested while doing Germany on a bicycle, found this steed of distinct profit at a later date. There were many devotees of the wheel among us, and one or two pestered the owner of this bone-shaker for permission to indulge in a spin. The barman saw a chance to make a bit and so inaugurated a regular cycle-hiring service, letting out his machine for a joy-ride round the camp at a penny a time. The spurt was brief and short, but the exercise and change from the eternal Shanks Pony was appreciated. For a time cycling enjoyed quite a vogue.

Every prisoner appeared to be afflicted with a brain-wave at one time or another whereby to make money, but few of the "stunts" survived more than a fleeting existence. One closely observant prisoner detected that the prisoners were wearing their linen and underclothing an inordinately long time, that the apparel was becoming exceedingly soiled, and that the guiding principle of clinging to the garment until, for various reasons, it could not be worn any longer, then to be discarded for a new rig-out was far from being economical. So he started laundrying. It was a case of wash in the evening and return for wear the following morning, many of the prisoners only boasting one shirt to their backs and one pair of socks to their feet. This enterprising individual found himself in great demand, though whether the proposition was really profitable is open to doubt, bearing in mind the heavy investment of soap, which he found imperative, and the hard work he had to put in to impart a semblance of enhanced cleanliness to the garments. It is a point for friendly argument as to whether the clothes were not dirtier after than they were before passing through his hands. At all events, their appearance did not undergo any tangible improvement. But his initiative sufficed to set a laundrying boom going. There was a run on the soap supplies and the launderers worked hard and long.

But this outburst of activity failed to meet with popular approval. The idea was worthy of support, but the main objection was levied against turning the lofts into drying-rooms at night. Muscular effort was at a discount in wringing out the superfluous water from the garments, and the lines of linen certainly did not conduce to the attractiveness of our sleeping quarters. But we would have tolerated the depressing sight which the saturated clothing depending mournfully from the overhead lines presented, had it not been for the copious weeping of the garments in question. Their wet sympathy with us in our sad plight was not appreciated. Soddened bedding or "one in the neck" while resting prostrate did not contribute to the harmony in a loft. The prisoners who were treated to impromptu christenings gave vehement expression to their innermost feelings, and peremptorily ordered the zealous launderers to dry their clothes outside.

The vested interests duly obeyed the injunction, though with unfeigned ill-grace. No longer was it possible for a poor prisoner to have his undergarments washed overnight and dried in readiness for the morning. At least a day on the line outside would be necessary. Consequently those who could not afford to invest in a change of clothing either had to continue wearing what they possessed until the material could hold together no longer, or, if submitting it to the tender mercies of the washerman, had to pass a day in bed until it had been dried. But, generally speaking, the laundry enterprise was not popularly acclaimed. Still, in accordance with the trend of things in Ruhleben, the laundry craze had a glorious run, all sorts and conditions of men participating. When we emphatically demanded that the drying should be conducted in the open air, we somewhat repented of our hasty decision. The limited open space outside the barracks and where at the time we were free to perambulate—those were the days before we had access to the "Field" for exercise—became



criss-crossed with a gridiron of lines upon which the washed garments flapped wildly, transforming the area into a scene somewhat reminiscent of the small gardens of a packed row of houses in a mean London street upon washing day. We certainly ensured our comfort at night by banishing the drying clothes from the lofts, but we suffered untold miseries during the long hours of the day.

There was one man among us who aspired to achieve triumphs in every field in which he essayed to venture. He was a plunger to the manner born. But he flitted so quickly from one branch of trading to another as to bewilder the various German firms with which he had negotiations. At last he reached the end of his tether, adversity coming up against him with a reverberant thwack. Yet his disaster created something new and novel in the life of Ruhleben. He was the first and, so far as I know, the only business man who failed to meet his commercial obligations.

I, myself, was not free from the desire to try my hand at any thing capable of earning money, of which I was in sore need. I commenced operations in a humble manner, contenting myself with washing shirts at a penny a time, then embarking upon washing cups, plates, and dishes, until I found it unprofitable. At a later date I launched out and advertised far and wide throughout the camp that I was open to buy anything and everything. I was snowed under by the ensuing volume of business, especially old boots. Then I ventured out as a professor of phrenology, and "feeling bumps" in Ruhleben proved very lucrative while it lasted. The only drawback was the limited number of pates upon which to experiment to keep such a subtle calling going for any length of time. But my sheet anchor was engraving, which I diligently prosecuted for many months, with jewellery and watches as side-lines. This venture proved a howling success, notwithstanding one or two Teuton official hunts through my little kiosk

for articles wrought of gold, which expeditions, however, were invariably void of profit to those concerned.

The company of My Lady Nicotine never tired the residents of Ruhleben : a warm welcome was extended to her both night and day, and it mattered not whence the fragrant weed hailed, so long as it comprised something in the smoking line. But British cigarettes were regarded as *de luxe*, although often those which came to hand in the food parcels from home were necessarily of the cheapest grade. Whenever possible I placed British cigarettes on sale, and a spirited rush invariably ensued. But I was somewhat inclined to be selective in my choice of customers, preferring to vend them to prisoners with whom I had established commercial relations, in this manner serving to keep my trading connection alive. On one occasion, when I had a stock of three or four hundred of various brands on view, another prisoner, evidently bent on establishing a corner in British cigarettes, approached me and offered a tempting price for my whole stock. I guessed the object of his purchase and as he was a commercial stranger to me I declined to acquiesce. He became more seductive and liberal in his terms, but to no avail. I expressed my determination to abide by the rule which I had set down—that was, to sell no more than 25 at one time to any one customer. He was somewhat importunate, but finding I was adamant in my terms, he finally had to depart a crestfallen would-be trust magnate. I had fairly squelched his grand cornering idea. I may say that attempts to corner this, that, or something else, care being observed to select some article in keen demand and likely to meet with an immediate sale, were always being made. Sometimes they proved successful : at others the plunger burned his fingers. In planning such coups success turned upon one's ability to jump in and out quickly. One never knew what the next day and its parcels were likely to bring forth to upset any cornering scheme. Moreover, it was

always risky to attempt to repeat a successful line. The first consignment might sell like hot cakes, and leave an apparent demand for more. But it was somewhat hazardous to rely upon this keenness being maintained. Probably by the time the repetition order came in the enthusiasm had worn off, in which event the goods fell flat.

It was this decision to make a splash in one line of goods only to which I attribute my trading success. On one occasion I ran to earth a Jewish fellow-prisoner, who, by some means or other, had got hold of a parcel of wrist watches. He was very keen to unload, but was somewhat at a loss as to how to proceed, which, bearing in mind his racial trading characteristics, may seem somewhat surprising. But the fact remains that he discovered the wrist watches to be a millstone round his neck. I got into touch with him, and expressing my readiness to buy the lot he thought he had struck oil. But I proved to him that buying and selling were two different things, and stated my terms of purchase. To him the price seemed ridiculous, but I held fast. We haggled for a long time, and then, seeing that I was getting somewhat tired of beating the air, and reflecting upon the circumstance that he had been unable to dispose of his acquisition, he came to my figure. I sold every watch before many hours had passed, and at an attractive figure, to the intense disgust of the Jew. He thought I had been fairly landed with a sticking line, and had been chuckling at his apparent scoop in getting rid of his burden at my expense, as he thought. But he was a commercial sport. He offered to sell me another consignment at a similar figure, but wrist watches were off so far as I was concerned.

One might wonder what possibilities for engraving prowess could prevail in Ruhleben. Yet it kept me going from morning to night as hard as ever I could go. When I started my business I canvassed the camp from end to end,



creating trade, and enjoining one and all to be right there with some suitable inscribed memento of the internment camp of a permanent character. Orders rained in upon me. Watches, links, brooches, and souvenirs of an amazingly diverse character were brought to me to receive inscriptions. I purposely cut the price to 50 per cent. of those prevailing in trade circles at home, inasmuch as I was in desperate need of some employment to keep me from ruminating upon prison life. Seeing that engraving calls for complete concentration of thought I was able to occupy my mind very effectively. Cups and other prizes awarded at the sports, testimonials, and presentations were entrusted to my charge to receive inscriptions, and some of these undertakings proved exceedingly difficult, but the more exacting the task the more interest I displayed in its fulfilment. One job, which I regard with intense pride, was the engraving of a pair of sleeve links, which were presented by the canteen staff to Mr. Pyke as a recognition of his masterly direction of that onerous and trying enterprise. It assumed the form of a pair of plain gold and enamel cuff links, and the order called for the engraving of 170 letters upon the four surfaces, each of which was about the size of a threepenny piece. The characters are naturally microscopic, but they are cleanly cut and easily readable. To convey some idea of the extent to which engraving proved remunerative to me I may say that I have earned as much as £4 in one day at this work, although it entailed labouring from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m., while in four months I cleared £150 profit from my kiosk.

Other industrious prisoners were equally lucky. When the prisoners commenced to take a personal interest in their appearance, especially in regard to their hirsute appendages, the professional barbers among us saw a golden opportunity and grasped it with a firm hand. The hairdressing saloon became part and parcel of every barrack. The barber assumed a pitch just within the entrance to each barrack,



the conditions naturally compelling him to carry his stock-in-trade to and fro every morning and night. They did a roaring trade, and each, by mutual agreement, secured an assured patronage. For an inmate of one barrack to entrust his hairdressing to the barber of another barrack was considered to be an unpardonable sin. A prisoner was supposed to support the hairdresser of his own barrack, and this feeling was so sedulously nursed among the vested interests that the hairdresser of one barrack would not willingly attend to a customer from another barrack. The men with the scissors and comb certainly raised the individual and collective interests of their profession to a high level of practical application. But hairdressing was subsequently ruled to be a necessary trade and a well appointed central hairdressing saloon was established in the Grand Stand and run by the Communal Government. As time went on and business developed the professions decided that they should similarly attempt to trade their brains. Poets set out to dispose of their effusions, authors and journalists their lucubrations, while artists and ticket-writers were not behind in their efforts to unload their masterpieces of art. The coming of the theatre and other forms of entertainment gave the artists and ticket-writers a glorious chance. The former gave full rein to their ability to devise striking and attractive posters, which were displayed upon all eligible advertising spaces. The latter were equally keen to demonstrate what big bold lettering could do to compel attention. Poets and writers found their markets somewhat more limited and difficult, no safety-valve being forthcoming until the camp magazine was launched. But while the zeal of the wielders of the brush was laudable prices ruled low. Water-colours sold as a rule for 3d. to 1s. each; art connoisseurs in Ruhleben were not disposed to pay fancy prices for unique contemporary masterpieces. Portrait-painters had a successful run owing to the absence of photography, but were

challenged keenly by cartoonists, the humorous in the internment camp never failing to make appeal. Another branch of activity which met with its deserving recompense was model-making. Some of these works were distinctly noteworthy, those dealing with sections of the camp, prepared to scale, arousing widespread attention from their striking fidelity to the most minute detail.

As the trading craze developed, anything which could be converted into something saleable by the expenditure of a little effort and ingenuity was keenly embraced. The garbage barrels were diligently ransacked for raw material. One prisoner rummaged round and collected the shallow pots and glass vessels, originally containing potted meat, jams, and other delicacies, which had been sent to the camp from home. These he cleaned and nattily worked up to be sold as ash-trays. He cleared them out speedily at threepence each, the Ruhleben club proving one of his most remunerative customers. Tins, pieces of wood, and other rubbish were similarly reclaimed, to be worked up into something or other of unusual novelty, utility, or souvenir.

Despite our mad zeal for trading, the calls of charity were never ignored. None of us was too busy to spare a little effort and labour on behalf of some good cause or other which happened to be advocated. On such occasions we all contributed liberally and cheerfully, and Charity never failed to profit. Needless to say when we got thoroughly going the pro-Germans regarded our commercial success with ill-concealed envy. Was not Germany the pre-eminent trading nation of the world? Were not her master-minds superior in every field of thought? They nursed these fallacious traditions grimly and set out to eclipse us completely : to vindicate the pre-eminence of German commercial methods. But they cut a very sorry figure when they got right down to business and came full tilt against our competition.

British commercial *amour propre* was wounded : we were put on our mettle. The pro-Germans did not hesitate to sneer at our shopkeeping tradition. We concentrated our trading abilities upon them and directly one got going we went for him tooth and nail. We proved, in a very convincing manner, notwithstanding our limitations, that when it comes to business the Britisher has got the Teuton beaten to a standstill. They had just about as much chance against us as a mouse against a cat, and we knocked them out, one after the other, with the greatest ease and to the infinite delight of the community as a whole. Within a short time Teuton business methods as paraded by the pro-Germans among us, and among whom, it may be mentioned, were many who had proved prosperous in German commerce before the war, became naught but a memory—one of sorrow and ruefulness to those who had elected to oust us, and one of jubilation and ecstasy among us who had put them promptly and completely into the commercial ditch.

While the commercial instinct was uppermost life in Ruhleben was brisk and crammed with incident. But as the facilities for expressing fertility of thought, initiative, and resource became curbed owing to the intervention of the authorities, and the economic depression developing in the country itself, whereby we were deprived of the requisite raw materials, trading zeal languished. The boom petered out, and it is to be feared that Ruhleben has relapsed into that state of suspended activity and despondency characteristic of the early days of the camp's existence.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### CHRISTMAS IN RUHLEBEN.

*" You can well understand our feeling of horror at the prospect of going through a third winter in a prison camp ! "*

In these words, contained in a letter to home, a prisoner still remaining in the clutches of the Hun expressed his inmost thoughts a few days before Christmas, 1916. The outlook was indeed dismal. Food was scarce, except for the parcels received from the Old Country ; fuel was running short, which portended the possible suspension of facilities for heating the barracks ; trading activity in Ruhleben had slumped—in short, a wave of utter depression had overwhelmed the camp of abandoned hope.

But it was the winter of 1914—our first in Ruhleben—which will never be forgotten by any one of the 4,000 odd interned British civilian prisoners of war. It was an unholy nightmare, the mere memory of which causes one who passed through it to shiver involuntarily, even when comfortably ensconced beside one's blazing hearth at home.

There was one thing more than any other which we regarded with the greatest dread. This was the prospect of being compelled to spend the joyful season of Yuletide under terribly harrowing conditions, and in exile. The much-vaunted Teutonic organisation had broken down lamentably under the strain which our internment had imposed. The officials were at their wits' end as to what



to do, and ultimately they followed their usual precept under such circumstances. *They did nothing!*

We misinterpreted this manifestation of Teuton helplessness and chaos very sadly. During the dreary days of November we nursed the thought that we should spend Christmas among our loved ones. What else could Teuton apathy portend? Our excitement grew intense, Dame Rumour being uncannily active in falsely sustaining our jaded spirits. The most sensational stories flew hither and thither through the camp as thickly as snowflakes driven before the wintry blast. The tenour of one and all was identical. We were going to be sent home. Whence these yarns started no one seemed to know, and cared less. They "jes' grow'd!"

Crouching over the abominable basin of acorn coffee and repulsive black bread, shivering with cold, which even our buttoned-up overcoats failed to keep out, fanned by icy draughts which penetrated from everywhere, presenting pictures of undiluted misery and dejection, with tempers too quick to permit the slightest civil word, a member of the party would valiantly strive to liven matters up somewhat by idly remarking:

"Did you hear that story down at the kitchen? They say all civilian prisoners are going to be exchanged on the undertaking that neither country will use them as soldiers."

"Shucks!" would come the wickedly growled comment from the uncompromising sceptics, accompanied by a demoniacal guffaw of derision from other disbelievers. But those hoping against hope, who happened to catch the words, clutched at them as desperately as a drowning man will grasp a wisp of straw. They seemed to offer a ray of pleasurable anticipation. With ill-concealed excitement they shuffled off to relate the story in undertones to colleagues who were similarly content to accept Dame Rumour's empty sustenance without the slightest questioning, the narrator embroidering the intelligence he had to

vouchsafe to satisfy his fantastic imagination. And so the idle remark was bandied from party to party, undergoing wonderful distortion and exaggeration meanwhile, until it had completed its circuit of the camp, and had returned to us. But in its second iteration it was scarcely recognisable. One of the prisoners, his face beaming, would burst in, and with an unfathomably firm and cheery conviction would yapp :

"Well, boys! We shan't be long now before we're home. The Germans have had enough of us, and are going to clear us out before Christmas! Fact! I heard it on good authority, and it's official!"

"What's the reason?" innocently interjected the disbeliever, who had ridiculed the rumour when first uttered.

"Oh! The fellow who told me says that Germany is finding it too expensive to keep us!"

The howls of derisive mirth with which the fantastic statement, uttered with solemn assurance, was greeted made the roof dance.

The bearer of the intelligence, nonplussed at such an unexpected reception of what he considered to be delightful news, would look round wildly, his mouth distended, and his eyes nearly bursting from their sockets in indignation and rage. Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he would either leave us in disgust, or, as was invariably the case, would realise that he had been neatly fozzled, in which event, with his spirits flung precipitately to zero, he would give vent to a savage curse, stamp out of the barrack, and scurry away to find the prisoner from whom he had gleaned the story, to treat him to a forcible physical expression of his outraged feelings.

Every hour brought its variation of the old, old story. Dame Rumour had a right good time among us during the few weeks immediately preceding Christmas. It was only the most hardened among us—those who had previously

tasted the bitterness of comparative stories while languishing in other German prisons—who had the hardihood to greet these yarns with ill-disguised noisy hilarity or unveiled hostility. Still, they were not without their compensations. They acted as a tonic to the most pessimistic of our confreres. Even the down-at-the-mouth brigade would cheer up wonderfully at their narration, and illumine their milk-souring faces with a knowing smile, which even repeated disappointment failed to quench. It was of no avail to riddle a rumour well and truly; its successor was certain to have a successful run until finally it encountered similar demolition. Personally, I have a very shrewd idea that it was certain of the officials among the Germans themselves, who, in the first instance, gave Rumour wing. From previous experience in Wesel, Senne-lager, and Klingelputz, I knew it was quite in keeping with their tactics, when occasion suited, to cultivate such a hope as that release might be anticipated. Thereby they were likely to keep us quiet and tractable. However, as time wore on, and the lying jade promised to get out of hand, the authorities became somewhat apprehensive as to the after-effects which would be likely to arise. They were sharp enough to see that once the prisoners saw through the delusion and realised that they had been mercilessly, even cruelly, although possibly neatly hoodwinked, that infinite trouble might ensue.

One morning we received a curt summons to parade. Everyone hurried up, taut with excitement, the optimists giving knowing winks and wearing that “I-told-you-so” expression. But their faces slipped very sadly when the officer, in those abrupt tones which only a Prussian can assume when provoked to a pitch of temper, roared:

“Prisoners! You will be permitted to receive parcels from home if you can get them. But if any further rumours are circulated through the camp relating to your pending release, which is *not* going to be considered for a moment,



no effort will be spared to trace their origin, and the offender, if caught, will suffer punishment."

This was shivering the idol of hope with a vengeance. Dame Rumour could not have been given a more effective knock-out blow. Yet there was a certain element of uncertainty concerning the issue which provoked discussion. The precise nature of the penalty to be dealt out to an irresponsible Rumorist was not vouchsafed, although we were pointedly told that it would be of a nature which would not be readily forgotten.

The facial studies which followed this pronouncement baffle description. I have never seen such a phalanx of lugubrious "all-is-up" expression. Moreover, the Teuton is nothing if not heartless when apparently extending concessions. It was all very well for the officer to remark, with assumed magnanimity, that we might receive parcels from home to cheer us at Christmastide, but how about those of us who hailed from Britain? How should we be able to receive such welcome gifts in time? Letters took from ten to fifteen days to reach home, owing to the caprice of the authorities, while parcels occupied from three weeks to a month to come out! And here was Christmas hard upon us! Truly cynicism is superlative among German characteristics.

The solemn warning, notwithstanding its grim emphatic character, did not exercise the slightest deterrent effect. The optimists, surviving the first shock of disaster, popped up as lively and as chirpy as ever. They construed the Teuton official action as an astute display of bluff. But those amongst us, who had suffered in other prisons, and who had every reason to know that the Germans meant what they said, decided to take the law into our own hands. Rumour had had far too long and untrammelled a sway. We caught one of the story-mongers red-handed. We did not denounce him to the authorities to ascertain the character of the punishment to be awarded to such worthies—



we promptly ducked him in the pond. The icy cold water quenched his fervid imaginative faculty very effectively, and Dame Rumour made a hurried unmourned departure from the camp.

Then the Germans artfully laid another snare to lull us into tractability. A carefully-prepared circumstantial story secured widespread circulation throughout the camp. This was to the effect that on Christmas Day we were to receive an unexpected treat. Although far from home, and victims of circumstances, we were to be given the time of our lives at the expense of the German nation. It was to be a time which we would never forget, and it would dispel every feeling of gloom and dejection. The Germans, so we were led to believe, were fully aware of the joyousness and festivity with which the Britisher honoured the Yuletide Season, and how keenly he appreciated roast beef, plum pudding, mince pies, and other numerous dainties associated with the season. This deeply rooted institution was to be suitably honoured.

This unexpected outburst of Teuton magnanimity and fellow-feeling took us completely by surprise. It seemed so foreign to the German nature. And I must admit that in one respect the authorities were correct in their prophesy. *There is not one of us who will ever forget the dinner received on Christmas Day, 1914, in Ruhleben prison camp.*

The announcement fulfilled Teutonic aspirations. The story provided us with another topic of conversation, which smothered all further discussion regarding pending release. Those who had fallen into the slough of despondency were re-lifted to a state bordering on ecstasy. The coming festivity was awaited with ill-concealed pleasurable relish, which is not surprising, seeing that we were struggling desperately to keep our pecker up on the meagre rations which were served out.

A week before Christmas I was the recipient of an unexpected treat. A parcel containing 400 British cigarettes

came to hand. Now, none of us had tasted the flavour of a home-made cigarette since we had been interned. The slender supplies which we had brought in with us had long since been exhausted. Lady Nicotine was merely greeting us at this time with those cheap articles which the Germans alone knew how to make—and to smoke! There were 140 men in my barrack, and the cigarettes were distributed among them, each man being invited to participate. No one can picture the joy which those fags gave. The men, as if dreading the too early termination of the pleasure extended, smoked them slowly, enjoying the taste and aroma of the tobacco to the full. But what were 400 cigarettes among so many? They did not last long. We came down to the sole remaining “coffin nail.” Who out of the twelve prisoners constituting the party of which I was a member should have the honour of its company? The settlement of this momentous and contentious issue was solved to everyone’s satisfaction in the true Ruhleben manner. We tripped outside the barrack, lit the cigarette, placed it upon a post, and each advanced in turn to take a draw. By careful management we succeeded in securing two puffs each, by which time the cigarette had been reduced to the shortest of short ends. But the discussion of this slender fragment, which we discarded, afforded extreme delight to a sailor who recovered it, and promptly rammed it into his pipe.

Christmas Eve arrived. With what delight we looked forward to the morrow. During the preceding days nothing had been discussed but the coming feast of Lucullus, which we were to receive in honour of the Day of Days. Even our wan, pinched faces commenced to glow in pleasurable anticipation. The few among us whom no specious German promise could buoy up, having had more than one experience in this connection, hesitated to express our innermost thoughts. We studiously reserved our opinions, being perfectly content to wait and see.

While the Germans might furnish us with another bitter disappointment, a kindly sympathetic heart outside was resolved that we should not be entirely deprived of all the joys associated with Christmastide. Mrs. K——, the wife of our popular colleague, W.T.K——, sent a parcel to each member of our party. It was hailed with unmitigated pleasure. Her womanly action was appreciated to the full, and although we felt that our joy was at the expense of our colleague, still we thanked him and his consort wholeheartedly and toasted their health.

As evening, gloom, and darkness settled down we became more fretful and taciturn. Strive how we might we could not banish from our minds thoughts of home, the merry times we were wont to have at this season of the year, and the pleasure we invariably took in providing unexpected surprises for our loved ones and friends on the morrow. Reflections and memories were harrowing, and many of the weaker prisoners broke down completely over their sad thoughts. They sought solace in tears.

Yet Christmas Eve was not without excitement. The "P.-G.'s" decided to have a right good old time so far as the limitations of their quarters would allow them, and they endeavoured to ignore the loyalist element completely. Their German friends and relatives had sent them bulky parcels, which, when opened, were found to be packed with little Teuton Christmas delights and emblems—coloured wax candles, diminutive Christmas trees, and such like. Armed with these sinews for keeping up the good Old Times these curs proceeded to spend Yuletide in true Teutonic fashion. The candles were stuck in the mouths of empty bottles, or other receptacles capable of serving as candlesticks, and displayed on the tables, while each prisoner routed among his belongings to fish out mementoes from home—photographs of wives and children, which were also set out in true gala array, many owners ostentatiously snivelling like weeping willows, shedding newly-fallen rain during



the task. When these hurried decorations had been completed to satisfaction, and the candles had been lighted, the sneaking humbugs commenced to warble the German patriotic songs, "Wacht am Rhein," and "Deutschland über Alles," as may be imagined, receiving the pride of place.

For these renegades to pass their time in this unblushing manner in our very midst was considered to be an affront of the very worst description to British susceptibilities. We listened to their inharmonious singing in silence for a time, though our blood soon began to boil with indignation and rage. We restrained ourselves as well as we could, but at last we had to get up to walk about to provide a safety valve for our injured feelings. While we shuffled and sauntered our hands itched to give these drivelling curs the merciless drubbings they deserved, and how we curbed our desires seems miraculous to me at this date.

We were all hustled to bed indiscriminately. But not to sleep. At all events, although I tried desperately I could not woo the Goddess of Dreams. So I got up to pace the narrow alley-way, extending the full length of the black hole, flanked on either side by the bunks containing my recumbent colleagues.

It was a racking promenade. One might have likened it to mounting watch and ward over a crowd of lost souls. The cold was intense; it penetrated to and chilled my marrow. Our quarters had not received any heating apparatus at that time, while many of the prisoners had not even been served with a blanket, which was regarded as every man's legitimate perquisite. They lay huddled in shapeless masses, snuggling together upon the dirty loose straw, to profit from the collective radiated warmth from their bodies. Here and there a prisoner had striven to secure a modicum of warmth by dragging a ragged, dirty coat tightly around him. One and all, almost without exception, were shivering in their sleep.



The straw, saturated with dirt, filth, and thickly invested with vermin, began to emit a noisome stench as it became heated up from the warmth disseminated from the emaciated bodies of the sleepers, with which was mingled the nauseating odour of stale clothing and accumulated human perspiration. The sleepers wriggled and tossed upon their unsavoury hard couches, like cattle vainly endeavouring to burrow into straw. As time passed the stench grew worse, until at last it could have given a big handicap to a pig-sty which has not been cleaned out for a year, and then have beaten it to a frazzle. Finally, even my stomach began to evince signs of rebellion.

The sounds coming involuntarily from the prone forms were heartrending. The majority of the men, their nerves over-wrought, were jabbering incoherently in their slumber. Some were babbling of their wives and children; others in the imagination of their dreams were frolicking around a phantom Christmas tree. Many were laughing demoniacally. Still more were raining curses down upon the heads of our oppressors. Many were crying and sobbing pitifully. Now and again one would start up suddenly, call the name of a beloved one at home, and then open his eyes in wonder. Catching sight of the grim rafters overhead, his thoughts would be brought back swiftly to the depressing prison. The startled one would then throw himself back upon his straw howling and moaning distractedly. It was a restless sea of outraged humanity calling out to Heaven in its sleep.

After a while, one or two other prisoners, who like me could not secure welcome oblivion through sleep, got up and joined me in my paces. But walking in the darkness was no panacea, so we decided to extract a little respite from our thoughts by emulating the actions of our childhood on such a night as this. We hung our stockings and socks from the rafters, as if in mockery of the dawning day of peace and good will. The occupation satisfied our minds.

At last, thoroughly worn out, we threw ourselves down to sink into a deep, well-earned and welcome sleep.

When the prisoners awoke and caught sight of the empty socks and stockings depending mournfully from the rafters the loft rang with hilarious shouts of mocking laughter and banter. But so far as our party was concerned the mirth was misplaced. True, our hosiery was barren, but under our straw we found welcome prize packets, containing handkerchiefs, cigarettes, socks, and other little trifles of which we were in sore need. A good fairy, once again Mrs. K——, had imparted Christmas spirit to our prison. Her husband had received them in bulk, and had surreptitiously slipped them beneath our straw. The discovery of these manifestations of womanly interest so deeply moved us as to prevent the voicing of a word of gratitude to our colleague. But our mute appreciation proved far more telling than the most profuse expressions of pleasure.

We were astir early, and the majority, each armed with his basin tucked under one arm, and his other hand clutching his hunk of bread, moved off to the Church under the Grand Stand, to participate in the early morning service with which we had decided to welcome the coming of Christmas Day. One of our number had agreed to officiate.

That Christmas morning service was attended by the most dejected and motley crowd of humanity which has ever graced the Established Church. It bore a more apposite resemblance to a casual ward. One and all shivered with the cold. Snow and slush carpetted the ground outside, while the air had an antagonistic biting sting. Some of the Faithful came in clogs; others with their feet protruding pitifully from sadly-worn and tattered footwear. Those possessing overcoats drew them tightly round them, but many appeared only in their thin vests, and ungraced by either collar or tie. I presented myself in my complete

wardrobe—coarse corduroy trousers, tied under the knee with string, hitched up by a tattered belt, and a grey shirt. We took the precaution to carry our basin and bread with us, because we were due at the kitchen at a certain hour to receive our matutinal meal, and the service was scarcely likely to terminate in time to permit us to return to our barracks for these accessories. It was the chilliest Christmas morning I can recollect, not only as regards the weather, but from the human temperament point of view as well. Things had grown so desperate as to cause it to be considered righteous to swear, and many men who had hitherto studiously refrained from uttering the mildest of strong language, now gave vent to their feelings when accosted in no unmeasured invective.

To me the service seemed strangely out of place. There was a conspicuous absence of that buoyant joyous atmosphere invariably associated with Christmas morning. Greetings were certainly exchanged, but in hollow mockery, with gibe and jeer. The service was uneventful, except in connection with the rendition of one hymn, the great Ruhleben favourite. This is Hymn 376 from the Ancient and Modern Hymnal, the last line of which runs :

*“ Give peace, O Lord, give peace again.”*

The words were hurled forth clearly and resonantly with fearful vehemence. Yet they could scarcely be heard. While the hymn was being sung munition train after munition train thundered along the main line barely a hundred yards away, bearing its fearful freight of missiles for dealing death and destruction, while the clatter of steel against steel was punctuated freely by the louder booming and growling of heavy guns undergoing their proving trials upon the adjacent testing ground at Spandau. The iterations of the words, no matter how religiously and sincerely, to such an accompaniment, appeared to be mocking at the Almighty.

Presently there came a lull in the rushing of trains and the booming of cannon. But the uncanny silence was broken by a more ominous sound so far as the prisoners were concerned. It was the tramp! tramp! tramp! of feet, at first muffled and indistinct but growing louder each second. Our fellow-prisoners who had refrained from attending the church service, were on their way to the kitchen to get their breakfast. Those shuffling feet brought us back to things material and creature with a disconcerting jolt. It behoved us to make haste lest we missed our small share of acorn coffee. One half of the congregation wildly snatched basins and chunks of bread to stam-pede after and to fall in at the rear of the marching throng. The remainder proceeded somewhat more leisurely, doubtless deeming undue hurry from the place of worship as unseemly. As I vanished through the portal I caught a fleeting glimpse of our colleague holding forth with his basin on one side and his portion of bread on the other. He left after his congregation had filed out to take up his position in the long queue.

As we received our coffee we heard more about the coming midday feast. There was to be a chop, sauerkraut, vegetables, sweets, and other delights. But above all we were to regale ourselves with a bottle of beer, and to cheer the afternoon with a cigar! These two last-named luxuries we were to receive as a special favour, and with the Kaiser's compliments!

We contained ourselves throughout the morning as best we could, until the hour of 11.30 came round. How the hours dragged. We mustered at full strength punctually to the minute, but it was not until 12.45, after a wait of  $1\frac{1}{4}$  hours in the line, that we were marched off to the kitchen, which we approached babbling and talking as excitedly as a gathering of children at a Sunday school treat.

During this walk others and I commenced to bet freely



that we were destined to receive a further powerful illustration of how the Germans do things. Those who were disposed to place implicit faith in the Teuton and his promises contested our depressing opinions with great gusto. We were unequivocally condemned as a band of "Croakers!" "Wet blankets!" "Jeremiads!" "Jonahs!" and other similar opprobrious terms.

Speculation was idle. We were not destined to be kept on the rack of suspension much longer. Those who were first in the line were pleased with themselves. The meal they received was fully in accordance with the much-lauded story. But when Barrack 3 reached the kitchen something seemed to have gone amiss. Either the first arrivals had been treated too liberally, or else the coldly mathematical Teuton had dropped a few figures from his calculations. At all events supplies were petering out at an alarmingly rapid rate. I merely got a bone without any meat—an island in a sea of dubious gravy, without even a fragment of potato to connect it with the china mainland of the side of the basin!

Those who followed fared worse. There was nothing in the soup line left for them. The Germans hastily remedied the unexpected deficiency by furnishing each man with a rasher of raw, repulsive fat bacon. But this hasty expedient did not suffice. By the time Barrack 6 arrived even the bacon had given out; there was not a shred of rind for them. They received nothing beyond a portion of greasy, more watery-looking anæmic soup. So this was the wonderful Christmas dinner about which so much had been said, was it? The disappointment of the prisoners from Barrack 6 was so intense, and the mutterings grew so loud, as to cause even the Germans to grow alarmed. Nothing could be done. But the officials, following the invariable Teuton practice when trouble appeared imminent, placated the grouching prisoners with honeyed words and specious promises of "something very nice for tea!"

Seeing that these unfortunate prisoners had been waiting patiently for over two hours to be awarded with nought beyond the ordinary daily fare, it is not surprising that they gave full rein to their thoughts, and audibly expressed their opinion of German system and organisation. They retraced their footsteps to their living quarters with their faith in German promises sadly shattered, and cherishing decided doubts concerning the coming dainty for their evening meal.

Upon receiving our dinner we were told to hurry to the Grand Stand to receive the Kaiser's presents—the bottle of beer and the cigar. I think the authorities must have deliberately plotted this additional luxury as a reward to the fleetest of foot. I sprinted for all I knew how, and discovered that it was only the first to arrive who met with fortune. I succeeded in getting both the bottle of beer and the cigar. The majority were forced to be content with one or the other, and counted themselves as mighty lucky to get even one-half of the promised gift.

Reaching our barracks, we made the most of our meal, supplementing official shortcomings with what our small parcels from home, a few of which had come to hand, would yield. The latter were shared out in the usual manner, but there was insufficient to go round. Our perturbation was not assuaged by the discovery of one disconcerting circumstance. The pro-Germans appeared to have fared best both as regards the dinner, beer, and cigars. These renegades devoured their meal with the utmost speed, smacking their lips ostentatiously and disturbingly loudly in their expressions of keen pleasure at such a treat. This unappreciated music did not conduce to the harmony of the barracks, especially among those who had failed to receive the promised meal.

We whiled away the afternoon in wrestling with the cigars so magnanimously presented to us by the All Highest.

My own opinion is that the Kaiser must have learned something concerning the verminous, filthy and noisome condition of our living quarters, and consequently, being generally accredited as of an inventive turn of mind, had evolved a type of disinfecting smoke to be submitted to exacting test at our expense. The weed was universally declared to be "*some cigar!*" but the less grateful and more critical unceremoniously dubbed them "Stinkers!" It is surprising to me that Christmas Day passed off without a big conflagration among the barracks to celebrate the festive season. These fiendish expressions of the doubtful Havana were discarded with striking freedom, because "British little Mary's" proved incapable of standing up to them. We followed the flight of each rejected smoke with its wickedly glowing end with eagle eye. Directly it alighted among the loose straw we pounced upon it and extinguished it before it could wreak any harm.

When the hour for the evening meal came round Barrack 6 scampered off to exact revenge upon the delectable dainty which it was due to receive. For the most part this luxury assumed the form of a herring, but the ungrateful recipients made one fatal mistake. They would persist in testing a Teuton gift herring with the olfactory nerve! The result was disastrous. Unfortunately, the authorities omitted to attach a certificate to each fish setting forth the date of its capture, or else they drew in error upon a fertilising mill for their supplies. We only knew they were herrings because the authorities said they were. In this instance there was no reason to doubt the veracity of their declaration—the fish themselves offered confirmatory evidence upon this point. But if those herrings had slipped from the hands of the prisoners who clutched them, they would have scuttled back to their homes in the North Sea, and would have left such a curtain of poisonous gas in their wake as to have protected them completely against recapture.



It was a miserable evening, being absolutely deficient in cheeriness and comfort. Mark Tapley would have been frozen into silence had he made any effort to have improved the dragging hour with witticism and banter. Our pro-German enemies alone proved capable of passing the time, and incidentally they provided us with the solitary form of amusement which came our way. They brought an array of tables from the Grand Stand, and with the utmost *sang froid* imaginable set them out in a continuous counter along the narrow solitary gangway bisecting the loft. By so doing they drove every other prisoner to his bunk, but this was immaterial to them. Out came the gaily coloured candles and other tawdry decorations. Within a few moments the whole loft was ablaze with light. Seating themselves on either side of this improvised table, each man withdrew his Christmas tree, planted it up before him, and with the other delights contained in his parcel set out to have a high old time.

The feelings of us crouching and shivering in our bunks, forced willy-nilly to watch and listen to these vipers, must be left to the imagination. At first we struggled hard to ignore them, but their raucous laughter, coarse jokes, ribaldry, and unabashed expressions of sympathy with the German cause, began to fan the flames smouldering in our breasts. When they burst out into exuberant song, and let fly the words of "Deutschland über Alles" with all the vigour they could command, the more fidgety among us got up and commenced to express displeasure in no unmistakeable manner. As the alley way was blocked by the tables, movement was difficult. We settled this issue by roughly pushing away any table which barred our path.

The scowlings and mutterings grew fiercer. One prisoner, a rabid patriot, at last declared the situation to be more than his flesh and blood could stand. He was somewhat too rough in passing a table to please the pro-Germans



sitting around it. They expostulated savagely, and he retorted just as energetically. Recriminations flew thickly, and voices commenced to rise in anger and protest. Thereupon the offending Britisher, discarding his coat and rolling up his shirt sleeves, declared his intention to mop up the floor with the whole blamed lot of them. From the attitude he assumed he would readily have put his threat into execution had a further contributory provocative word been uttered by any "P.-G."

The appearance of armed force restored order, but not entirely to the fancy of the traitorous element. The British loyalists were peremptorily ordered to bed—and so were the "P.-G.'s." They protested, declaring they were doing no harm, but the guards were taking no risks. "Better prevent a fight than be called upon to quell one," was their guiding precept. So our enemies were forced to surrender ignominiously. Candles were speedily extinguished, and together with the other clutter were ordered to be put out of sight. Unfortunately, we had cause to regret having taken such drastic measures. We were condemned to suffer a repetition of the highly offensive nightly decorations and celebrations for nearly a week, during which the Christmas festivities were prolonged, the orgies only coming to an end when the candles had been consumed.

Boxing Day threatened to be every whit as depressing, but one or two of us, having shaken off the dejection into which we had been plunged by a cheerless Christmas, endeavoured to infuse a little of the fun and excitement of a seasonable British winter Bank Holiday into our existence. We had a merry snowball fight, to which I have referred elsewhere, but which was summarily interrupted by the guard. We were hustled back into our barracks. Still, for a very brief period we enjoyed ourselves wholeheartedly and forgot our miserable surroundings.

The solitude, darkness, stench, vermin, and cold of the barracks brought us back to our dismal, aimless life at

Ruhleben with added emphasis. Our spirits sank to a lower level, and we passed the enforced idleness of Boxing Night heads in hands, ruminating and wondering how it all would end! I have spent many a Christmas under strange conditions, but the memory of one is indelibly seared into my brain. The recollections of the first Christmas spent in the internment camp of Ruhleben in 1914 will never be forgotten: they will remain with me until the end.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### WHEN THE PINCH BEGAN TO BE FELT.

I HAVE already described the meagre fare upon which we were supposed to keep body and soul together in *Ruhleben*. Even the advocates of scientific dietary must concede that sugarless and milkless coffee made from acorns, a small basin of repulsive looking, non-nourishing soup, and one-fifth of a slice of black bread per diem constitute short commons for a healthy man. It was more the indomitable spirit of the Britisher than the food which kept us going. Physically we suffered severely, the rations being ideal for the achievement of a weight-reducing objective. We all suffered a reduction of adipose tissue, our weights sinking to such alarmingly low levels as to promote the common saying that, if we ever did get home, we should be useless for any profession but that of a jockey.

We grumbled loud and long during the very early days, when food was comparatively plentiful in Germany, but at a later date, when the rations suffered reduction both in quantity and variety, mumbling and grouching gave way to tense apprehension. Shorter commons did not affect those who were flush of funds so adversely as the poorer members of the community. The canteen constituted an excellent stand-by, because there we could get various odds and ends in the commissary line, so long as we were prepared to pay for them, and which enabled us

to stifle the needs of the inner man. Thus very good *brodchens* could be purchased at two a penny, and, needless to say, they were in urgent demand.

The outlook first began to assume a sinister aspect when we found the bread ration suffer a distinct diminution. The shrinkage was so marked as to prompt the feeling that ere long we should be compelled to go without the staff of life. As time passed we could not regard the canteen and pocket-money as an adequate sheet anchor, because the *brodchens* disappeared from the former. They could not be obtained for love or money to keep British prisoners alive. The distressed citizens of the Vaterland were in need of them—they came first and foremost when the claims of British prisoners had to be taken into consideration. Subsequently a substitute for these appreciated *brodchens* became available. It was a composite or "necessity" bread. While lacking comparative attractiveness it was tolerably palatable, although it was more expensive.

The shortage of bread naturally hit us severely. There ensued a general tightening of the waistbelt, while faces, already pinched, became more pinched. One and all began to suffer terribly, but we bore the situation with the stoicism of Indians. Privation became more widespread and intense as the weeks passed without bringing any amelioration of the state of affairs.

Matters at last reached such a pitch as to provoke a general discussion as to whether we ought not to take the problem of our future welfare into our own hands and make an appeal to friends and relatives at home for assistance. This solution of the problem had been advocated once or twice previously, but the general consensus of opinion had been in favour of refraining from writing home for food. By March, 1915, the situation had become so acute as to force us to resort to action of this character, though it was attempted much against our will, one and all feeling that



those at home must certainly have their hands full to provide in plenty for their own quivers, and that it was scarcely fair for us to saddle them with the expense of sustaining their imprisoned compatriots lingering in a German prison camp.

But necessity knows no law, and so, under the pressure of "Little Mary," out went post cards bearing a frantic appeal for bread to be sent to us from Britain. It was this cry which must have roused the homeland to the true state of affairs prevailing in Germany, especially in the prison camps. But although we dispatched the urgent "S.O.S." call far and wide we realised that weeks must elapse before we could possibly receive a tangible response. Those intervening weeks were dark indeed. We were reduced to a condition bordering on starvation; how the less fit among us kept going we never knew. It seems but a nightmare at this date. Everyone went hungry, and so hungry as to be ready to execute any deed, no matter how repulsive its appearance, so long as it brought something in the form of food with which to fill the void under our waistbelts.

Our despairing cry met with a wonderful response. I shall never forget the scene in the camp upon the arrival of the first stream of the good, wholesome and nourishing bread of old England. We rubbed our eyes at the sight of it, fearing that we were but the victims of a dream. When the loaves were dealt out, one and all were shy of eating it, notwithstanding the fact that it was as hard as a brick, owing to the long time it had occupied on its journey to Ruhleben—about three weeks. When we did tuck into it how we smacked our lips at the flavour and lingered over the fragments. Not a piece was wasted: we would have fought with the birds for the capture of the crumbs.

In order to gain some idea of the measure of our unrestrained delight at tasting British bread once more, it

is necessary to gain some idea of the staff of life which was being served out to us by our captors. The proportion of wheat constituent must have been reduced to absolute vanishing point. The exterior was crusty and as hard as a dog's biscuit. Indeed, I do not think a lover of canines would ever have given his four-footed companion such food. But while the exterior was hard and had to be gnawed, the interior was invariably a soddened mass, reeking with moisture and invariably only partially cooked. Personally, I do not think an attempt was made to cook it throughout, but that it was withdrawn from the oven the moment the exterior, under the influence of a brisk fire, had assumed the requisite degree of hardness.

It was not so much the repulsive soddened appearance and feel of the interior of the loaf which aroused such nausea as the ingredients employed. To break open a loaf was akin to taking a dip in a lucky-tub: something unexpected was certain to be found. Sometimes it was a wisp of straw three or four inches long—half-inch lengths were so common as not to arouse a moment's second thought—at others a hunk of potato peel or a fragment of tree bark. They were loaves of mystery in the fullest meaning of the word, and we hesitated to enquire too deeply into the character of the constituents employed, lest we received a surprise which would have compelled us to renounce the food in disgust.

I became an enthusiast in collecting the pieces of foreign matter discovered in the bread, prosecuting this hobby as diligently as a philatelist or numismatist pursues his quest. I kept them all, and my personal endeavours were supported by several comrades, who, knowing my penchant in this collecting line, contributed their surprise discoveries. In this manner I secured quite an imposing survey of the odds and ends, possessing absolutely no nutriment value whatever, which were associated with the German-provided staff of life.

Matters descended to such a pass as to provoke the general opinion that we should make representations to some powerful quarter in the desperate effort to secure an improvement in regard to the bread question. With every succeeding day the men were growing visibly weaker. So debilitated did we become that those who enthusiastically indulged in a trifling burst of daily exercise, such as a few minutes at football, had to abandon their recreation, merely because they were not strong enough to pursue it! We had to husband our strength and vitality in grim earnest. More than one man resolutely clung to his bunk for fear that undue movement or exertion would deprive his enfeebled body of the meagre reserve of strength and vitality which it retained, or accentuate the pangs of hunger.

But alas! There was only one court to which we could make appeal. This was the American Embassy. When first mooted this proposal failed to meet with general acclamation. We were rather disposed to trust to luck and to work out our own salvation. But finally hunger got the upper hand. We petitioned the United States' Ambassador to intercede on our behalf. The first letters failed to draw a reply, doubtless owing to the fact that they were intercepted by the authorities or because they infringed the regulation that all letters addressed to persons outside had to be posted unopened, so that the camp authorities might acquaint themselves of the tenour of the contents. And this law was so rigid as to apply to communications sent to the Embassy, which had assumed the responsibility, so far as it lay within its powers, for our well-being. We did cherish the thought that such letters would be safe from official censorship, and that the authorities would leave subsequent action to the discretion of the Embassy in question, which naturally would not exceed its limit of action as we very well knew. But the Germans are ignorant of the meaning of the word "honour," preferring to judge other people by their own standard and interpretation

of terms. While we have no absolutely confirmatory evidence as to the German authorities having deliberately destroyed, or accidentally (?), mislaid any communications addressed to Mr. Gerard from prisoners in Ruhleben Camp, there is sufficient circumstantial evidence available to prove that our misgivings upon this question were not ill-founded.

When, finally, a representative did visit the camp we drew attention to our direful plight with a daring flaming appeal. We wrote in the dust upon the Ambassador's motor-car "For God's sake give us bread!" and threw into his vehicle freely-written letters, emphasising the true conditions prevailing. The plaintive cry did not go unanswered. Mr. Gerard, with the promptitude which signalled all his intercessory efforts on behalf of the British civilians, when conditions were not exaggerated or imaginary, agitated for an increased supply of the essential of which we were in such serious need. Three days after his visit the ration reverted to the normal, but, as was always the case, after the sensation had lost its nine days' interest, the American request was honoured more in the breach than in the observance. Gradually but persistently, the daily dole once again suffered reduction, until it regained the level which had compelled us to petition the assistance of our solitary guardian angel.

Indeed, I really think we suffered from having so boldly sought the aid of the American Ambassador, inasmuch as the last stage of the bread question was far worse than the first. We were served with bread which was absolutely uneatable: even men torn with hunger hesitated to tackle it. The interior was as saturated with water as a sponge, was quite uncooked, and was nauseating both to the palate, the eye, and the nasal organ. We could wring the water out of it. It had to be eaten rightaway: to keep it even for a few hours was to see it grow mouldy, musty, and even to decompose. Some of us, who were frugal,



endeavoured to keep it for a short time, in the hope that it would become more solid as the water evaporated, and thus assume a more palatable and satisfying flavour. But this was a mistaken policy. Others who were compelled from circumstances to eat it at once suffered severely from indigestion and stomachic troubles galore, all of which were directly attributable to the bread.

The discontent grew more serious. We pestered the authorities with requests to improve the bread, but for an appreciable time without avail. At last they relented somewhat. If we felt so disposed we could change the "new" loaf for a "stale" one. But we speedily refused to accept this alternative, inasmuch as the so-called stale bread was really food which should have been consigned to the pig-tub. It certainly was stale and somewhat hard. But it was revoltingly green right through, and mouldy.

I can illustrate the contempt with which this bread was regarded by the relation of a little incident which happened one night. We had all turned in, and the majority of the prisoners either had fallen into a more or less sound slumber or were dozing, thinking of home. I was reading. Suddenly I espied a rat—we were not free from this pest although food was scarce—crawling along the shelf upon which we had placed some bread to "mature." It was a lean, lank and vicious looking specimen of its race, and its eyes glistened at the sight of something in the edible line. It grabbed a fragment of a slice and was making off with it. I had been watching the rodent, and, at its requisitioning of a portion of our larder I up with a boot and flung at it. As may be imagined the boot created a fearful clatter. One of the dozing prisoners sat bolt upright, and, catching sight of me laughing quietly at the rat, which had scuttled precipitately, he yapped:

"What the blazes are you up to now?"

"A blarmed rat is trying to pinch some of our bread!"

“ Let the poor devil take it. We can’t afford rat-poison here, and the bread is more deadly. He won’t want any more ! ”

We learned subsequently that our shortage of bread was entirely due to the difficulties which the German nation was experiencing in maintaining its population, thanks to the stringency of the British blockade. Berlin was deeply incensed against our country, and at that time was strafing Great Britain and the British with a deadly venomous strafe. At one meeting, held in Berlin to discuss the desperate situation, and at which many notable dignitaries of the German Government made speeches reeking with anti-British venom, one of these amiable individuals, referring to the internment camps in Germany and the privations of the prisoners in all seriousness, vehemently recommended that “ we should all be starved to death ! ” From the way in which the authorities were going to work it certainly seemed as if this delightful suggestion were being put into execution.

During this trying period the poorer members must have succumbed to hunger but for the assistance rendered from the Communal Funds. The profits from the various enterprises enabled large purchases of edibles, including bread, to be made and sold at a comparatively reasonable figure, as I have already explained. The price thus being brought within the reach of the less well off among us, they were able to keep themselves just going, although they had to pinch things very tightly in the operation.

The parcels of food dispatched from home only arrived in the nick of time—had they been delayed there would be few remaining in Ruhleben to-day, inasmuch as we were virtually *in extremis*. But once the parcels commenced to trickle in, and as the stream grew more voluminous with each succeeding week, our dread apprehensions vanished. The lucky recipients of the first parcels saved

the situation. They shared their food so far as they were able, with the object of letting one and all derive every possible benefit and accretion of strength and vitality. It was a somewhat curious spectacle seeing a man without a cent in his pocket with which to buy food, but who had a parcel from home, dividing the contents with one or two colleagues whose pockets were bulging, or at least well-lined with the sinews of war, but who could not turn it to useful purchasing account at the time, and whose parcel had not arrived. But it was turn and turn about : we were brothers in adversity.

There was only one exception to this unwritten rule. The "P.-G.'s," even when reduced to sore straits, could not stifle their foremost failings—selfishness and gluttony. I have never known a member of this tribe to share a crust either with one of his ilk or a loyalist, nor would he ever reciprocate a friendly turn which had been dealt out to him. When a "P.-G." received a parcel he grabbed it avariciously, but not to return to his barrack. Instead, he dived round a corner and sought out a spot where he thought he was safe from observation and interruption. Comfortably ensconced he opened his parcel, his eyes glinting greedily, and fell upon the contents as if he had not a moment more to live, or as if fearing that a hungry hand would stretch out and snatch a portion. Time after time I encountered one of these gentry devouring his parcel with the gluttony of a half-starved wolf, and with a manner which appeared to be certain to produce a wicked snarl if anyone ventured near to seek a crumb. But this was not all. After the gluttonous skunk had swallowed his treat from home he emerged from his kennel and snivellingly wheedled round a loyalist who had likewise received a prize, in the effort to coax a further portion from the liberal-handed, good-natured comrade. Needless to say, when at last we rumbled to the "P.-G." trick, a cur approaching upon such an errand was received with as

much good grace as would a mongrel, who, having had its fill, is hanging around for more.

Naturally, bread received from home was so keenly relished as to relegate the official staff of life to second place. But as we never knew, nor could divine, what would happen next, we carefully secured our bread ration, to store it against a rainy day. Obviously, when the last fragment of British bread had disappeared, we had to fall back upon the domestic product to tide us over the interregnum until further supplies came to hand from the old country. But this provision against the future represented so much wasted precaution.

One morning we were roused out to parade. Each man was commanded to return to his barrack, to proceed to his bunk, and to stand by it. We wondered what was about to happen. This was something entirely new. However, we obeyed the instructions, and stood by our possessions in patience. Soldiers and officers clattered in. Each man was approached in turn and requested to produce every ounce of bread which he possessed. There was no escaping the injunction. The soldier conducted the search, and ransacked everything thoroughly, the prisoner whose goods and chattels were thus being unceremoniously rummaged being compelled to stand mutely alongside, biting his lips to restrain his rage. All the bread thus recovered was assembled and then re-dealt out in equal portions among us. Consequently, those who had stored their bread had only done so to suffer a compulsory re-share out. Still, the incident served to bring home to us the rapidly increasing desperation of German circumstances to demand such a paltry action.

When we learned that bread was on the way to the camp from England we speculated among ourselves as to whether we should really get it. Would the mob, pressed by hunger, allow it to reach the camp? Would not the harassed German housewives and their men-folk raid



the vehicles laden therewith? Such were the fears which disturbed our minds. But the authorities had initiated adequate precautions to ensure the safe delivery of the prisoners' parcels. Had an attempt been made to secure forcible possession of the contents of the railway trucks and delivery vans the raiders would have paid sorely for their temerity. The latter were brought into camp under a strong military guard with loaded rifles. Needless to say we appreciated this protection upon the part of the authorities. It conveyed the impression of being prepared to give us a square deal, at least in one connection, and so far as my experience is concerned I must confess that I rarely lost a food parcel from home. A delay occurred once or twice, but upon complaint the authorities prosecuted enquiries, and the errant consignment was duly discovered and delivered. Fortunately the precautions observed by the authorities proved adequate to safeguard our property during transit.

But bread was not the only foodstuff which occasioned anxiety. Milk was in heavy demand, especially among some of the more delicate prisoners who could not digest readily the infamous war-bread. Milk was easily procurable at the canteen, and at the nominal price of  $3\frac{1}{2}$ d. to 4d., until suddenly the Berlin Press, learning that we were getting a first quality article of high standard at a low figure, wanted to know why British prisoners should be permitted to fare better than their own people? It was a specious argument, but merely beggared the question inasmuch as the milk was bought and sold by the Communal authorities. However, the newspaper agitation bore fruit from the national point of view. Fresh whole milk was knocked off the list of permissible foodstuffs and could not be bought for love or money. Limited quantities were reserved for the use of invalids, but in the course of a few weeks even this essential to a hospital dietary was abandoned in favour of skim milk,

which, in turn, gave way to condensed milk. At intervals a wail went up in the domestic press over this, that, or some other article of food which could be obtained in the camp, with the pertinent comment that it was scarcely playing the game to permit mere prisoners to secure, even if they paid for it out of their own pockets, what was denied to the German population. Such a wave of paper and ink indignation invariably achieved the writers' desired end—the article under criticism vanished from our list of foodstuffs.

It was deeply galling to us to be compelled to submit to such persistent curtailment of the limited range of edibles, but there was one feeling of satisfaction. The German public, as a whole, was suffering quite as acutely, if not more, than we were. The camp was overwhelmed with stories relating to the food riots and frantic struggles for comestibles in Berlin. At first we attributed them to that lying jade, Dame Rumour, but the stories were so circumstantial as to compel us to believe that there must at least be a leaven of truth in them.

To satisfy our curiosity upon the point we pestered our guards with questions, but they maintained a chilling silence. They knew nothing about the incidents to which we referred. But when the guard was changed we found the newcomers, who had experienced a turn in the trenches, far more communicative. One or two of the soldiers with whom I contrived to get on intimate terms did not hesitate to acknowledge that women and children had been shot, wounded, and otherwise injured in the course of frenzied struggles for food in the capital. They did not seem to be surprised at such action, because they, in the trenches, as they candidly admitted, had been unable to obtain sufficient food, and had been forced to sustain themselves on bread which was quite as objectionable as ours.

At first I thought they were merely romancing in order to keep us quiet, but from personal observation and investigation I discovered that they had under-rated, rather than

exaggerated, the alarming state of affairs in Germany. Many of us, unable to eat the war-bread, or owing to the fact that we were relying upon supplies from home, were disposed to be wasteful over the ration. We would eat the outer crust and well-cooked portions, discarding the remainder as refuse. When we turned over our hoards we likewise threw away those pieces which had become so mouldy and rotting as to be beyond human consumption.

This wastage was observed by the powers-that-be, and, accordingly, an order was circulated that bread was not to be discarded. What was not required, or what had deteriorated from prolonged keeping, was to be placed in a special bin attached to each barrack for official collection at intervals. We were told that it was to be served out to the pigs: that approximately represented its proper destination, although I think a self-respecting porker, unless pressed by hunger, would have turned up his snout in disgust at it. But we, in our innocence, thought the pigs would get it, and so those who could thus afford it supported the refuse bread bin liberally.

Night after night I observed the soldiers ransacking these bins to add to their stinted fare, but discreetly turned a blind eye in such direction, inasmuch as it was to our advantage to keep on good terms with the guard. After all, these soldiers who had been through the furnace of shell and explosive on the Western Front were not bad fellows at heart: they were far more commiserate and sympathetic than had been those whom they had superseded. When they first came to the Camp to relieve the former guard, composed of men who had not seen active service, there had been a lively breeze between them. The outgoing soldiers referred to us as dirty *schwinehunds* of Englishmen who must be closely watched, and they proceeded to give the newcomers many tips and wrinkles. The men from the front listened patiently and then shook their heads sagely as they remarked, "You, comrades,



have not been to the trenches yet. We have, and we know more about the Britishers than you do. They are not at all bad fellows, and, look you here, they are clean fighters!" Such home truths were far from being palatable to the off-going guards, but the raw fighting man could not argue with the veteran, and so departed strafing us more ferociously than ever, until experience in the trenches probably brought about a revision of opinion.

Neutrals visiting the Camp, when questioned, would sometimes lift the veil upon the state of affairs existing outside, although, from motives of discretion, they were very guarded in their replies. Nevertheless, their fragments of information were sufficient to convince us that the German people as a whole were passing through hard times.

But the most conclusive information was brought in by a fellow prisoner, and his experience seemed to me somewhat humorous. He had commercial connections in the country, being, in fact, a Britisher resident in Germany, although in this instance he was as loyal as the most rabid of the loyalists. He had been petitioning for some time to be permitted to go to Berlin to complete some vital business matter, and his importunity had finally been rewarded to the extent of a day's leave on "pass." This entitled him to quit the camp at 7.30 a.m. and to be excused until 8.30 p.m. of the same day. He thought that leave of thirteen hours in one day would be adequate for him to complete the matter on his mind, and he had left the camp in the early morning punctually at the permitted hour, extremely thankful to be able to leave Ruhleben behind him if only for one brief day.

I was hurrying from my kiosk to my barrack for the mid-day meal upon the day in question when I ran full tilt against our colleague. It was barely half-past one. I looked at him in surprise, and was impressed by his look.

"What are you doing here? Thought you had gone to Berlin on 'pass'?" I finally blurted out.



"So I did," he answered, looking round warily, "but I was mighty glad to get back. I have never seen such sights in my life. It's awful. No wonder our food is so bad. The people there are fighting tooth and nail to get bread, meat, or anything else in the eating line. And the feeling against the British cannot be imagined. Had they discovered I was an Englishman they would have torn me limb from limb. I am not a nervous man, but the state of affairs frightened me. In fact, I abandoned all idea of finishing up my business transaction, and came back by the first tram I could catch."

The man certainly seemed scared. His experience had completely unnerved him. He was even afraid of his own shadow at the moment, but for an entirely different reason. As I was about to resume my walk he caught me by the sleeve whispering in an alarmed tone:

"For Heaven's sake don't say you have seen me. I am hiding myself until the evening. If the authorities know I am back, they will realise that I have seen more than I ought to have observed in Berlin, and that I know a good deal about the state of things in the capital. They are bluffing us for all they are worth, and if they see me before nightfall they will conclude why I came back before my 'pass' was up. A prisoner is not so deeply in love with *Ruhleben* as to want to get back to it hours before he need do!"

I appreciated his logic and readily extended the promise. I knew full well that if caught he would be punished on suspicion of having communicated unpleasant truths among the prisoners. He succeeded in keeping himself unobserved until late that evening, when he reported himself in due course and in good time to the authorities. His experience, however, furnished the camp with food for animated conversation, since he brought red-hot face-to-face personal experience upon the matter, which was of absorbing import to one and all.

One may wonder why we evinced such an intimate interest in the German internal food question. But it struck at the very root of our existence. If the Germans had insufficient foodstuffs to keep themselves how were we likely to fare? We should certainly be placed on the shortest possible commons, and if the worst came to the worst, we were likely to be left to shift for ourselves. We knew enough of the Germans to realise that they would not hesitate to deprive us of food entirely if matters reached a crisis. This was the haunting fear. We could see the day when they would turn round and leave us to our own devices looming in the distance. Every successive week witnessed a diminution in our rations. What could be cut down was cut down remorselessly. The journey to the kitchen began to assume a farcical aspect. We tramped there empty and hungry and we came back with precious little in our hands to keep "Little Mary" quiet. As a matter of fact, those who were receiving supplies regularly from home refused to make this trip for food. It was regarded as so much wasted time and useless expenditure of effort, because the comestibles we were receiving were steadily declining in quality and were verging perilously near the line of being absolutely inedible. Great effort was required to eat it, and an indifferently nourished body revolted savagely at the indignities to which it was being subjected.

We came to rely more and more on the parcels from home, and we felt extremely grateful to our relatives, friends, and strangers who kept us steadily going. But for this timely help we should have starved. When we opened the parcels the soldiers would stand around looking longingly and with their mouths watering at the delicacies revealed. Their admiration securing the better of their discretion they would mutter, "Mein Gott! What food in war-time!"

We ourselves could not help but extend pity to the



### A GROUP OF PRISONERS FROM BARRACK 5.

The centre row are the Author's box mates. The horse box is 10 ft. square, where six of us lived together.





guard, who, we discovered, were placed on the most meagre rations. When we heard their comments concerning the contents of our parcels we would smilingly proffer them some dainty. At first they would merely give a sickly smile and shake their heads negatively, but half-heartedly. We could see that they longed to accept our hospitality but feared to be seen doing so. However, as hunger pressed them, they readily accepted what we offered, and eventually did not hesitate to beg for what we could spare. As a rule we contrived to eke something out for them, for which they extended the most heartfelt thanks. As a matter of fact, it served to amuse us, although the tragedy of it all was not lost upon us, to follow the keen competition between the under-officers and their men to be first in the surreptitious overhauling of the refuse bread bins, since it must be pointed out that such action constituted a flagrant breach of a petty regulation. What we declined to eat was for the pigs, not the arrogant military of Germany, although the latter were only too pleased to get what they could at the expense of the occupants of the stys.

But we could not resist meditating upon the ultimate outcome of it all. When under-officers and privates were ready to quarrel like the sparrows over bread refuse, what would happen when the people at large came to the end of the tether of patient waiting? One and all knew we were receiving excellent food from home, since the appetising contents of the parcels consigned to Ruhleben were bruited far and wide. When we were unduly depressed we would freely speculate as to whether the emaciated populace, stung to frenzy by hunger, would resort to force, and make a bold bid to intercept our parcels. This thought was ever in our minds, and it is a possibility which to-day disturbs the serenity, such as it is, of Ruhleben Camp more than anything else. The day mob law secures the upper hand in the Germanic Empire, and

the consignment of the parcels for prisoners at Ruhleben becomes imperilled, travail will come to the camp. Without this sheet-anchor the civilians interned upon the banks of the Spree must certainly perish.

To those who are sleeping soundly at home this statement may seem untowardly pessimistic, but it is one which will be endorsed by every man who has suffered in Ruhleben. It was a frequent topic of conversation, and while we used to laugh as we sat round our table enjoying the array of delicacies contained in the latest parcel from home, and would jocularly venture "Wonder what'll happen if the beggars ever take it into their heads to raid our parcels?" we did not turn a blind eye to such a possible calamitous eventuality.

That matters have reached a critical stage in Germany is admitted by one and all, but I think the most poignant testimony to this knowledge is that offered by a letter which has reached my hands. It was written by a colleague who suffered internment at Ruhleben and with whom I became quite chummy. He was released from the Camp some time after I had returned home, but for reasons best known to himself had not, up to the time of writing, left Germany.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### FREEDOM AT LAST !

WHILE from time to time our ranks were thinned as a result of certain prisoners being sent home, such displays of apparent consideration and humane feeling upon the part of the Teutonic authorities were spasmodic and far between. For the most part our colleagues selected for restoration to their own firesides were suffering from physical degeneration as a result of their privations and insufficient and limited food, or what was far more likely to be the case, were showing signs of mental instability, precipitated from the self-same cause. The first were hurried away because the Germans were extremely anxious to preserve a low mortality rate in Ruhleben ; the second cases were likewise despatched with undue haste from the circumstance that the domestic asylums were sufficiently crowded with natives whose minds had become unhinged.

This selection of prisoners for return to Britain only served to bring home to those remaining behind the utter hopelessness of their position. It certainly seemed as if the German threat that we were to be kept in durance vile, and herded like cattle until the war had run its course was to be fulfilled. From whatever viewpoint the future was regarded the prospect was black. We did not dispel the innermost feeling that the war might last for years, and that as the Germans became more and more hard pressed, we might be called upon to bear an accentuated

share of their privations. The alternative of having to go out of our minds before securing freedom was similarly depressing. Indeed, in this event release resolved itself into a question of merely moving from one prison to another, because if we should chance to reach home in a mentally deficient condition, we would be almost certain to be re-consigned to a British establishment for the feeble minded.

The effect exercised upon the more morbid and moping members of the fraternity in Ruhleben was disastrous. If anything, it served to aggravate their feeling of despair. They walked about as if in a dream, and were exasperatingly silent upon all topics of conversation other than their individual futures and the general outlook. They either would not, or could not, shake off the feeling of melancholia and neurasthenia with which they were gripped ; in fact, they made no attempts to wrest themselves free from these insidious enemies to health. From prolonged brooding upon their condition and the future, they grew emaciated, wan, and weak, both in mind and body, while the feeling of dejection, effectively banishing sleep, only served to render them still more querulous and depressed and plunged them still deeper into the mire of despair.

I was hurrying through the camp to my kiosk one day when I ran full tilt against one of these all-is-lost brigade. He instantly commenced to unburden himself of the one topic consuming his entire thoughts, finally remarking in a tone of despondency, which chilled my assumed buoyancy of spirit :

“ What a hell of a hole this is ! ”

I looked at him narrowly and his face startled me. He was about as cheerful as a condemned man walking to the scaffold. I saw he was on the brink of bodily and mental collapse, to whom extension of sympathy would be about as useful as a straw to a drowning man. So I promptly returned :



" Oh, it's not so bad——"

" Where the hell have you come from, then ? "

The inquiry was interjected so viciously as to cause me to start, while the tone in which it was uttered induced me to eye him narrowly. My nonchalance had stirred the fires of fury with a vengeance, as I could see from his flashing eyes. So I hastily satisfied his curiosity, with an affectation of indifference :

" Oh ! Wesel, Klingelputz, and Sennelager ! "

The mention of the word " Sennelager," the evil fame of which had spread even to Ruhleben, caused him to drop his jaw, distend his eyes, and to regard me with blankest wonder. He surveyed me for a few seconds, then realising that I had certainly got one or two up on him, he went on his way nodding his head sagely. Ruhleben in comparison with Sennelager was Elysium, and further argument concerning the deficiencies of the first-named was certainly cut short with an abruptness which could be felt.

Judgment upon Ruhleben, indeed, was a matter of pure perspective. Not that I mean to refute the fellow-prisoner's opinion that " Ruhleben is a hell of a hole," because no one can say otherwise. But Ruhleben has this advantage over the other camps in which I have suffered. No cruelties were practised. We were not turned into slaves, were not made hewers of wood and drawers of water, as had been my fate at Sennelager. We were not subject to a bureaucratic pettifogging, military jurisdiction, with the word of the Commanding Officer as absolute as the law of the Medes and Persians, nor under the thumb of a despot whose one recreation, or occupation of mind, was the evolution of punishments for this, that, and something else, no matter how trivial, and who took a fiendish delight in subjecting his helpless captives to tortures of the most devilish description.

But Ruhleben grated, with just as much accentuated severity, upon the nerves of those Britishers who had been

summarily cornered and at once transferred to this concentration centre. They felt the deprivation of freedom very keenly. Fortunately the population had a distinct leavening of prisoners who, like me, had tasted the dregs of the cup of bitterness in Sennelager, Selllager, or some other black hole in Germany, and when we related what we had suffered, those around promptly formed the conclusion that although their lot was indeed unenviable enough, they counted themselves as mighty lucky to have been consigned to this spot right away instead of being condemned to previous acquaintance with the "hells" of the miseries of which they had heard.

But while the authorities at Ruhleben refrained from torturing the bodies of their captives, they did not hesitate to stretch the minds of the latter upon the rack of suspense, buoying up the hopes we raised, and taking a fiendish delight in thrusting us back again into the depths of despair. Our disappointment was as humour to them, such is the perverted Teuton mind.

The possibilities of the Germans in this respect were brought home to the Ruhleben prisoners most acutely upon the occasion of the first notable exchange of prisoners, that is, an exchange upon a comprehensive scale, which took place in November, 1915. Rumours to the effect that some big movement of this description was under way had been flying thickly through the camp for some time, and we could not refrain from remarking that the authorities, contrary to the established practice, and notwithstanding that the supporters of Dame Rumour were infringing one of the many regulations which had been enacted for our welfare, did not contradict the statement, which served to induce us to hope that for once the usually lying jade was right.

The anticipation with which we looked forward to some definite official step towards the realisation of our dream of release may be imagined. The all-is-lost brigade became

quite chirpy, and went about with smiles on their faces. When at last a parade was called, and numerous questions were asked, the character of which bore upon the subject which all had at heart, excitement grew intense. The camp buzzed like a beehive awakening from its period of hibernation with the first burst of spring sunshine. Speculation as to how many would be chosen, in the event of the much hoped-for *en masse* release not being fulfilled, rose to fever-heat. Each prisoner vigorously advanced a hundred and one reasons for his individual selection, while the more optimistic were ready to stake anything that they would be included in the lucky number.

But as the days passed without the result of the questioning upon parade maturing, faces once more began to droop and spirits to flag zerowards. The optimists were quenched, while the pessimists became more despondent than ever. Those prisoners who, like myself, had been through the mill of Sennelager, could not refrain from smiling. We had experienced this kind of trick on more than one occasion in that camp, and naturally concluded that the officials at Ruhleben had contracted the self-same malady merely to cow us more than ever.

Then came a revival of excitement. The authorities called out a list of names during a parade, and announced that these prisoners were to submit to the ordeal of having their photographs taken. Single portraits were stipulated, and we were informed that arrangements had been made for a photographer to visit the camp to consummate this command. But we had to pay for our own photographs! There was a mad rush by the lucky ones to the corner of the camp where the man with the camera had pitched his studio, comprising a bench capable of receiving three sitters at a time. I do not think that any photographer has ever been surrounded by such a bevy of excited clients. Certainly he drove a brisk trade. The order called for two copies of each portrait, one, as we learned subsequently, for affixing

to the passport and the other for filing in the records. The official photographer proved a sorry specimen of his craft, while his instrument was probably only worth a few shillings. Being a tutor of photography, I did not hesitate to dub the man to be an amateur, and a mighty poor one at that. The pictures were small, about as large as the familiar sticky-back, but he had the audacity to mulct us rs. 6d. for two miserable prints.

Of course, the fact that photographs had been taken by authority was regarded far and wide as a step nearer home. To some of the fortunate prisoners the homeland appeared to be just over the fence. Naturally they talked excitedly of home, wondered how things had gone during their absence, speculated upon the changes that had occurred in their wives and children, and other topics of pure domestic interest. The frenzy which prevailed was indescribable. But that photographing preliminary proved a terrible snare. It was not the stepping-stone to Freedom, as the majority declared. There are many prisoners languishing in Ruhleben to-day whose portraits were taken as far back as November, 1915, and to them home is still as remote as ever.

One despicably cruel episode in connection with this preliminary deserves to be related, if merely because it serves to indicate the lengths of mental torture to which German system will proceed. The photographer had completed his work for the day. It was the end of his task, I might say. Suddenly a few more prisoners' names were given out. Radiant with pleasure at the unexpected turn of events in their favour these men presented themselves to the man with the camera, and their portraits were taken in due course, of which they received the stipulated two prints, and for which they paid the usual eighteenpence. But those prisoners were destined to observe party after party of prisoners depart homewards without being included among their number. The reason transpired



afterwards. Apparently the photographer had driven a bargain with the authorities. He had contracted to take so many portraits per day, the figure being decided to render the visit to the camp worth his financial while. Upon this occasion the number fell short of the pre-arranged aggregate. So to satisfy the arrangement the deficiency was made up by selecting prisoners to the number required, merely to have their photographs taken, and thus enable the man with the camera to draw the financial reward to which he was entitled as the result of his labour! It was merely an exhibition of daylight robbery, but it fulfilled the much-vaunted German system.

Reverting to the first photographic preliminary, a few days elapsed, during which time the oscillating spirits of the photographed prisoners suffered another fluctuation towards zero. Then came a kick in the opposite direction. Instructions were circulated to the effect that at six o'clock the following morning a list of the names of those prisoners who were to be exchanged would be posted on the camp notice-board. As may be readily imagined, there was little sleep among the prisoners that night. The dawn of the morrow was awaited with a keen expectancy which cannot be described. The sanguine passed the dragging hours packing their belongings, while those who could scarcely contain themselves at the turn of fortune's wheel in their direction were too keyed up to speak, or nursed terrible fears that, after all, they might not be numbered among the lucky ones.

The night dragged wearily and far too slowly. In the early hours of that forbidding, chilly and raw morning, when the buildings stood out more drab and sombre than ever against the murky eastern sky, the expectant prisoners made their way to the notice-board. That space, although blank as yet, was an irresistible magnet. It possessed an element of cheerfulness and budding hope which the

barracks could never give. They whistled, hummed, chatted excitedly, stamped their feet and clapped their hands across their chests to keep themselves warm, and their spirits at boiling point. By five o'clock the board was surrounded by a clamouring ocean, hundreds having turned their feet in its direction in the half-hope that, at the last minute, some miracle had occurred to bring their name upon the fateful list.

When at last the papers were posted up a wild scramble ensued. Men at the rear clambered upon the backs of those in front, and almost forced their eyes out of their heads in the effort to catch sight of the magic letters forming their name. Those in the front row, spotting the name of a colleague, yelled it out lustily, and gave a wild cheer of delight. Within a few minutes Bedlam was let loose. Caps were being thrown into the air, strange capers were being cut by those who could think of no other way of giving vent to their pent-up frenzy. "Old boys" of sixty years of age cavorted as friskily as lambs. Congratulations were showered on one and all. Many of the more wearied and ill were so overcome at the realisation of their fondest hopes as to be unable to express their pleasure in mad cheering and frantic dancing. They expressed their delight in tears.

That morning revealed one of the strongest traits of the British character in its most powerful form—to abide by Fate and to bestow whole-hearted cheerful good wishes upon those upon whom Fortune had smiled so gladly. The German soldiers regarded the scene with strange stolidity. They were completely nonplussed. They could not understand why prisoners, who had been turned down, could whoop and cheer as frantically and gaily at the luck of a colleague, and so whole-heartedly as if they themselves were bound for home.

But there was another side to the picture—one which was tragic and pathetic. Some of those who had been

confident of release went almost crazy with disappointment and rage when they discovered their names to be missing from the list. They scanned it time after time in a kind of stupor, fearing that in their first hasty perusal they had made a mistake. Then, the awful truth dawning upon them that they were to remain in the camp indefinitely, re-action set in. Some fell to the ground in utter dejection. To them all hope had completely vanished. Others crawled away silently to a quiet corner to nurse their bitter defeat. Still more crept back to their barracks, sullen, taciturn, and almost demented, with an uncanny, furtive glint in their eyes, while many sought solace in tears. While that fateful board brought the greatest happiness in life to many, to others it was nought but the indication of a blank, black future and visions of the grave.

\* \* \* \*

The regulation concerning the conveyance of letters was exceedingly drastic. The order set forth that no papers of any description were to be taken out of the camp. Newspapers, even those of German origin, were included in the ban. While a preliminary search was to be made in the camp before departure, the final and most inquisitive investigation was to be conducted at the frontier. One and all were warned that if any paper were discovered at the latter point, then the carrier thereof would be immediately re-transferred to the camp, and would have to stay there until the war was over, no matter what happened.

But even that list upon the notice-board came to be regarded with fear. It had not been up very long before an official appeared, and, running down the list, erased certain names. At this action there was a fearful uproar. Had the list merely been posted to tease and harry us? Was this another manifestation of Teuton cruelty in a refined form? It certainly looked like it. And no further

names were substituted for those withdrawn ! At frequent intervals the official re-appeared, and further revisions were made. Truly the list was becoming as fearful a trap as the procedure of being photographed. As the hours passed the fretting prisoners became more and more intractable. The men who had concluded that they were certain to reach home before Christmas, from the publication of their names, shuffled about the camp, their limbs twitching strangely, as a result of their nerves being strung to their greatest tension upon the rack of anxiety, afraid to peruse the board, yet hanging around it with a strange interest, and scarcely daring to speak.

No relief to the torturing anxiety was afforded until after "lights out" the following day, when the captain of each barrack, in accordance with instructions, presented himself to the men within his particular building. The prisoners had sought the solace of their couches. He stood in the gangway of the ground-floor, his face unusually grave and set. Then in slow, deliberate and loud tones, so that one and all might hear, he cried :

"All those who have been photographed with a view to exchange, and whose names have not been struck off the list, must appear at the Captain's office—the bureau of the Commanding Officer of the Camp—tomorrow at 2.30, to have their passports signed by a representative from the American Embassy. Although I am sorry for those whose names have been struck off, it is absolutely useless for them to keep worrying the Captains, as we have no knowledge whatever as to the reason for such action. The order came direct from the military authorities in Berlin, and for all I know they may be restored to the list to-morrow morning."

The announcement was received with mixed feelings. Those whose names had weathered the fickleness of the authorities were jubilant, but in a restrained manner,



while they had a kindly thought for those who were suffering such bitter disappointment. Turning to these comrades, they remarked, with evident feeling and forced gaiety, "Cheer up, boys, your turn will come next month."

Preparation of the passports was a protracted and searching ordeal. The authorities were determined that no substitution should occur, through a prisoner, overcome by sympathy for a comrade, sacrificing his chance to return home. During the following days further racking suspense was suffered, since never a word was vouchsafed as to when the actual departure for home would take place. The uncertainty was agonising, because by this time, from what had occurred previously, every lucky prisoner recognised full well that he could not count himself as out of the German clutches until he had actually crossed the frontier and was off the hated soil of the country. There was the constant risk of the old precept concerning the slip between the cup and the lip being resolved into the concrete.

Again the Captain of each barrack presented himself to enunciate an official command. On this occasion he was very brief. He merely stated :

"All those who have had their passports signed must present themselves at the Wachter to-morrow morning at 10.0, with whatever luggage they wish to take home."

That was all. But it brought distinct relief to many a harassed mind. That night was one of remarkable activity. The lucky prisoners busied themselves packing their treasures and belongings, indulged in parting chats with the men who had been their comrades for sixteen weary months, partook of farewell feasts arranged in their honour, and went round to other buildings to shake hands with their friends. Never was the dawn of day awaited so radiantly and anxiously as by these fortunate colleagues.

They were far too excited to sleep, while those who were to be left behind were every whit as anxious to witness their departure. At the back of our heads we feared that something would certainly eventuate, which, according to Teuton logic, would be sufficient to induce them to change their decision, even at the very last minute. This was the first exchange upon a comprehensive scale. If it failed, or a hitch occurred, then one and all might confidently anticipate long exile in Ruhleben. On the other hand, if the bargain was conducted honestly by the German Government, then there was hope for one and all, since we had already ascertained that such exchanges were to be conducted at monthly intervals. Alas! Hope springs eternal, but I think this quality has disappeared from the gaunt, emaciated, half-starved, shivering and debilitated Britishers remaining in Ruhleben. Hope has proved such a fickle reed.

As may be imagined there were no laggards at the Wachter the next morning. Long before ten o'clock, the appointed hour, those who were to be released from bondage were at the rendezvous. I shall never forget the procession, and the assembly lined up in readiness for the final procedure, before leaving the detested camp. It was a motley crowd and a sickening spectacle. I do not think there were half a dozen fit men among them. The sifting process had been conducted by the German authorities only too well. They did not intend to free a man, who, upon his return home, was likely to be able to do much to enable Britain to prosecute the war to a successful conclusion. Some were so debilitated and ill as to be scarcely able to walk; one or two were carried; while others were so weak, famished, and in a condition of semi-collapse, as to be quite unable to carry their baggage. But there were many willing hands to help them. The remaining prisoners generously shouldered the luggage, and extended stronger arms to support the weak.

The weather was execrable. A keen wind was driving across the camp, and it carried the penetrating sting of winter. The prisoners upon reaching the Wachter were ordered to set their traps upon the ground in front of them, and to release all straps and securing devices, to enable the examination to be conducted with as little trouble to the authorities as possible. Then they were ordered to "stand by." The halt and maimed, presenting pictures of utter misery, despite the twisted smiles which lighted their wan faces, shivered as the freezing wind broke against them, stamped their tired weak limbs to keep life in them. It was merely the joy of getting away from the accursed spot, the anticipation of being in their own homes within the immediate future, and the fact that they would soon have the company and care of their loved ones to nurse them back to health which kept them up. Had anything happened at this last minute to interfere with the arrangements, and necessitating return to barracks, I verily believe that many men would have dropped where they stood.

The authorities appeared to snatch keen delight from keeping the poor wretches waiting. At all events they did not make the slightest attempt to hasten the formalities, which, perhaps, is not surprising, seeing that the average Teuton official has about as much pity and fellow-feeling as a cat towards a mouse. But at last the officials came trundling out, and the search commenced.

The baggage was put through its paces. This operation was conducted with characteristic German thoroughness. Some of the bags were about as decrepit as their owners. Wear and tear had played sad havoc with handbags, grips, and portmanteaux. Many were in fragments, and odd corners of the leather exterior were missing. But liberal recourse to string enabled strapping difficulties to be overcome, while many layers of newspaper covering the jagged

holes formed a passably protective covering to the precious contents.

But this newspaper armouring was regarded as an infringement of the regulations. It was ruthlessly torn out, to be collected for destruction. Not a scrap of paper was permitted to remain. Even the letters which prisoners had received from their families, relatives and friends, and which they cherished affectionately, were confiscated. Many of the prisoners had received photographs of their wives, sweethearts, and children, from home. By dint of great patience they had made wooden frames for these pictures, and therewith had graced the walls of their prison. Even these were not spared. The officials tore the photographs out and threw them to the ground. The prisoners were free to take home the empty frames! The ransacking of the baggage, and the heartless confiscation of such jealously guarded treasures were harrowing, the tears coursing down the cheeks of the older and more enfeebled.

Each article within a bag was taken out, shaken, and closely examined to see that nothing was being taken away which officialism ruled as *verboten*. As the articles passed scrutiny they were flung to the ground. When the ordeal was completed the prisoner was compelled to re-pack his bag. By the time the search was finished, every bag was appreciably lighter, and those which had suffered from the ravages of war and internment were sorry articles indeed. The contents protruded pathetically through the jagged holes, cracks and crevices. It was merely the string which kept the goods intact.

But the search served to reveal to us the critical straits to which the German nation had been reduced as a result of the British blockade. Owing to the cold the prisoners had purchased at the camp canteen, woollen underclothing, rugs, and other articles of attire. One and all were unceremoniously removed from the baggage, the order



being announced that no woollen goods of any description were to be allowed to leave the camp. Some of the prisoners had also purchased new pairs of boots, when they discovered that their release was definitely concluded, and had packed these in their bags, preferring to travel in the old footwear until the country had been left behind. But new leather boots came under a similar ban, and were to be left behind. The forbidden articles were not actually confiscated. They were not to be taken out of the camp. They could be taken back to barracks, where their owners were free to sell or to give them to their colleagues. One or two of the more resourceful prisoners dodged the order concerning new footwear very neatly. When the boots were removed from their bags they promptly sat on the ground and changed them, leaving the discarded articles, which were certainly the worse for wear, for anyone who might like to appropriate them. The officials were somewhat amazed at this solution of the problem, but they could do nothing to prevent the action, since the boots were the prisoners' private property while he was in the camp. Exchange is no robbery, says the proverb, and in this instance I think the ingenious Britishers got the best of the bargain.

The examination completed, and the bags re-secured and sealed, the prisoners were dismissed with the curt intimation that they were to parade the following morning at five o'clock at the Casino. The prisoners were not permitted to carry their baggage back to the barracks. This was placed under guard, and taken to the railway station by a special van. As may be supposed this final examination was followed keenly by the other prisoners. They were alert to gain points. No one knew but what his turn might come the following month, so it was just as well to learn as much concerning the necessary formalities as possible, and to make complete arrangements to satisfy the authorities.

The following morning the camp turned out *en masse* to speed the parting comrades. The lucky prisoners were lined up and searched, the prisoners who were to be left behind being carefully roped off to prevent smuggling of forbidden communications and articles. This operation was conducted quickly, while the officials, to the amazement of the spectators, appeared to be imbued with a sudden desire to treat the departing men with civility and courtesy, doubtless to create a final good impression. As they were marched off to the station we gave them a rousing farewell cheer, with such vehemence and spontaneity as to startle the guards. But we who were to remain behind, though heavy in heart, and naturally envying the lucky ones, were not to be downed. A precedent had been established, and there was every reason to cherish the hope that we might be numbered among a future fortunate batch.

That initial journey was not free from tragedy. Before many miles had been covered the train had to be stopped. Once the train had started, and the terrible buildings constituting the internment camp of Ruhleben had slipped from sight, one of the prisoners, overcome by the prospect of soon reaching home, fell a victim to the forces of reaction. He set out upon the longer and final journey across the Great Divide. His body was removed to be committed to German soil.

Such is the procedure to which exchanged prisoners are submitted before they are allowed to leave Ruhleben. It is typical of the Teuton system, and is conducted with maddening thoroughness and attention to the most minute detail.

The establishment of the exchange system was of far-reaching individual concern to myself. For some months I had been hoping against hope that, sooner or later, some such arrangement might be concluded.

Directly I learned that the exchange of prisoners was being mooted throughout the camp, I lodged an application with the authorities for inclusion among the favoured.

\* \* \* \*

My name duly appeared upon the notice-board as a prisoner to be exchanged.

\* \* \* \*

Things proceeded uneventfully

\* \* \* \*

Jewellery was also prohibited I now learned. This hit me hard. I had purchased a solid silver bag for my wife. Seeing that it was purchased with hard-earned money, I valued it highly, more especially as, during my leisure, I had freely engraved it, this handiwork including, among other devices, the inscription of the names of the four prisons in which I had been incarcerated—Wesel, Sennelager, Klingelputz and Ruhleben—together with the respective dates.

\* \* \* \*

The train, as usual, started from Spandau, was under military guard, and proceeded direct to the frontier.

\* \* \* \*

Reaching the frontier the train was stopped. Every man jack of us was turned out and forced to parade beside the line, one or two soldiers with fixed bayonets mounting guard. We were counted and recounted to make sure the number of prisoners tallied with the official consignment note, since we were handled like freight. This ordeal sufficed to prove how utterly impossible it would have been for anyone to have secreted himself upon the train, because it was ransacked from end to end, inside and out, above and beneath.

\* \* \* \*

At last the train jolted forward once more—but how slowly! To my strung-up mind, it seemed to take as long to cover those few remaining yards to safety, as it did to complete the miles between the internment camp and this outpost of the German Empire.

\* \* \* \*

The next moment I was safe, and I did not care what happened.

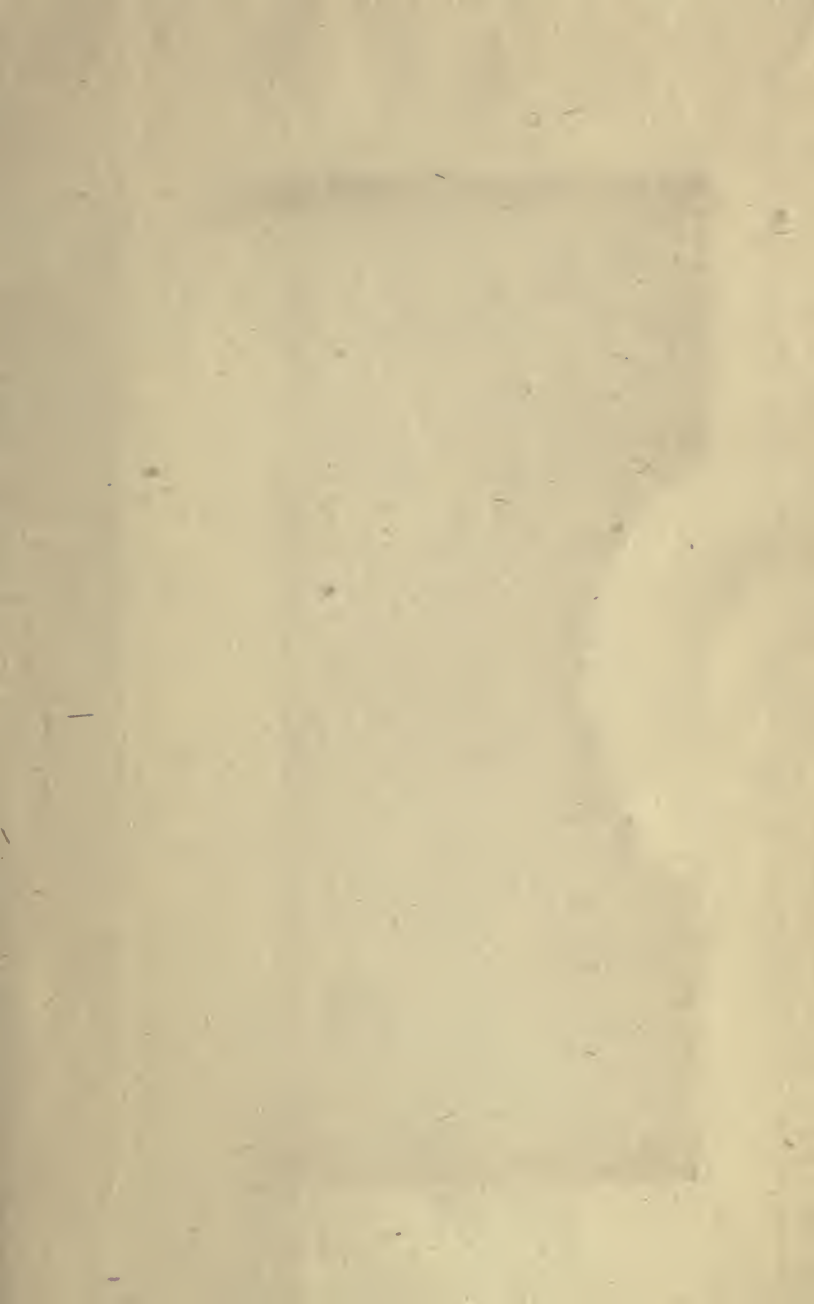
\* \* \* \*

One cannot imagine the sigh of satisfaction which went up as we drew into the Dutch station. The prisoners stretched their arms and expanded their chests, to drink freely and fully of the sweet air of Freedom. The hospitality of the Dutch almost overwhelmed us. It seemed so strange to be feted and to be pressed with appetising food-stuffs and dainties of every conceivable description, after what we had endured for so many months.

A few hours later we swung into the estuary of the Thames, and a cheer went up as we threaded the field dotted with the fighting ships of the Home Country. That glimpse of Britain's Silent Might infused new life into us, and we gave expression to another cheer at the hearty welcome we received from the sailors who watched us ploughing Tilburywards. To appreciate the feeling with which I stepped ashore, and once more trod upon the firm soil of Free Britain, one must have been in bondage, to have suffered cruelties and privations indescribable. Then, and not until, one is able to form some opinion of what return to the Homeland and all that it signifies, conveyed to me, the returning Exile.

THE END.







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